

# The CALENDAR of Modern Letters

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## The Wood Demon.

A Comedy in Four Acts.

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Translated by S. S. KOTELIANSKY.\*

### CHARACTERS.

ALEXANDER VLADIMIROVICH SEREBRYAKOV, a retired professor.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA, his wife, aged twenty-seven.

SOPHIE ALEXANDROVNA (Sonya), the Professor's daughter, by his first marriage, aged twenty.

MARIE VASSILIEVNA VOYNITSKY, widow of a Privy Councillor, the mother of the Professor's first wife.

GEORGE PETROVICH VOYNITSKY, her son.

LEONID STEPANOVICH ZHELTOUKHIN, a wealthy young man, who has studied technology at the University.

YULIA STEPANOVNA (Julie), his sister, aged eighteen.

IVAN IVANOVICH ORLOVSKY, a landowner.

FYODOR IVANOVICH, his son.

MIKHAIL LVOVICH KHRouschov (the Wood Demon), a landowner, who holds the degree of doctor of medicine.

ILYA ILYICH DYADIN.

VASSILI, Zheltoukhin's man-servant.

SEMYON, a labourer employed at Dyadin's flour mill.

### ACT I.

The garden of Zheltoukhin's estate. The manor house with a terrace; in front of the house, at a platform, there are two tables; the large table is set for lunch; on the smaller table are placed zakouski [hors d'œuvres]. Time: A little after two o'clock.

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### I.

ZHELTOUKHIN and JULIE (*coming out of the house*).

JULIE: You'd better put on your grey suit. This one does not become you.

ZHELTOUKHIN: It doesn't matter. Nonsense.

JULIE: Lennie dear, why are you so dull? How can you be like that on your birthday? You are naughty! . . . (*laying her head on his chest*).

ZHELTOUKHIN: No sentiment, please!

JULIE (*through tears*): Lennie!

ZHELTOUKHIN: Instead of all these sour kisses, all these loving glances, and little shoes as watch-stands, which are no damned use to me, you'd better do what I ask you to do! Why didn't you write to the Serebryakovs?

JULIE: Lennie, but I did write!

ZHELTOUKHIN: Whom did you write to?

JULIE: I wrote to Sonya. I asked her to come to-day without fail, without fail at one o'clock. Honestly, I wrote to her!

ZHELTOUKHIN: And yet it is past two now, and they're not here. Still, no matter! I don't care! I must give it all up, nothing is to come of it. . . . Only humiliations, and a rotten feeling, and nothing else. . . . She doesn't take the slightest interest in me. I'm not good-looking, I'm uninteresting, there's nothing romantic about me, and if she were to marry me, it could only be out of calculation . . . for the sake of money!

JULIE: Not good-looking . . . You've a wrong opinion of yourself.

ZHELTOUKHIN: Oh, yes, as if I were blind! My beard grows from there, from the neck, not as beards should grow . . . My moustache, damn it . . . and my nose . . .

JULIE: Why do you press your cheek?

ZHELTOUKHIN: It aches again under the eye.

JULIE: It is a tiny bit swollen. Let me kiss it, and it will go.

ZHELTOUKHIN: It's silly! (*Enter Orlovsky and Voynitsky*.)

### II.

The Same, Orlovsky and Voynitsky.

ORLOVSKY: Duckie, when are we going to have our lunch? It's past two!

JULIE: Godpa dear, the Serebryakovs haven't come yet!

ORLOVSKY: How long have we to wait then? I want to eat, my sweet. George too wants his lunch.

ZHELTOUKHIN (*to Voynitsky*): Are your people coming?

VOYNITSKY: When I left, Elena Andreyevna was dressing.

ZHELTOUKHIN: They're coming for certain then?

VOYNITSKY: You can never be certain. Our General may suddenly imagine he has got an attack of the gout, or some other caprice—and then they will stop at home.

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ZHELTOUKHIN : In that case let's start. What's the use of waiting ? (shouting) Ilya Ilyich ! Serguey Nikodimich ! (Enter Dyadin and two or three guests.)

### III.

The Same, DYADIN and the guests.

ZHELTOUKHIN : Please help yourselves. Please (*standing round the table on which the zakouski are placed*). The Serebryakovs haven't come. Fiodor Ivanich isn't here ; the Wood Demon, too, has not arrived . . . people have forgotten us !

JULIE : Godpa, will you have a drop of vodka ?

ORLOVSKY : The tiniest drop. Just so . . . That'll do.

DYADIN (*adjusting the napkin round his neck*) : How superbly you manage everything, Yulia Stepanovna ! Whether I drive across your fields, or walk under the shade of your orchard, or contemplate this table,—everywhere I see the mighty power of your bewitching little hand. Your health !

JULIE : There are all sorts of worries, Ilya Ilyich ! Last night, for instance, our Nazarka forgot to let the young turkeys into the shed, and they spent the night in the garden in the dew, and this morning five young ones gave up the ghost.

DYADIN : Such a thing oughtn't to happen. A turkey is a delicate bird.

VOYNITSKY (*to Dyadin*) : Waffle, cut me a slice of ham !

DYADIN : With particular pleasure. It is a superb ham. One of the wonders of the Arabian nights (*cutting*). I'm cutting it, Georgie, according to all the rules of art. Beethoven and Shakespeare could not do it better. Only the knife is a bit blunt (*sharpening the knife on another knife*).

ZHELTOUKHIN (*shuddering*) : W-w-w ! . . . Stop it, Waffle ! I can't bear it !

ORLOVSKY : Tell us, George Petrovich, about your people. How are you all getting on at home ?

VOYNITSKY : We aren't getting on at all.

ORLOVSKY : Any news ?

VOYNITSKY : None. Everything is as it used to be. Just the same now as it was last year. I, as usual, talk a great deal and do very little. My old jackdaw of a mater keeps on jabbering about the emancipation of women : with one eye she's looking into the grave, and with the other she's searching in her clever little books for the dawn of a new life !

ORLOVSKY : And how's Alexander ?

VOYNITSKY : The professor has, unfortunately, not yet been devoured by moths. As usual, he sits in his study from morning to night. "Straining his wits, knitting his brows, he composes ode after ode, but no heed is paid either to him or to them." Poor paper ! Sonya, as usual, reads clever books and keeps a very clever diary.

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ORLOVSKY : Dear old chap, dear fellow . . .

VOYNITSKY : With my sense of observation I ought to write a novel. The plot is begging to be written. A retired professor, an old hard-tack, a learned kipper . . . Gout, rheumatism, megrims, liver and all sorts of tricks . . . He's as jealous as Othello. He is forced to live on the estate of his first wife, for his pocket can't afford to keep him in town. Always grumbling about his misfortunes, although he's extraordinarily happy !

ORLOVSKY : Well, now !

VOYNITSKY : Of course ! Only think what luck ! I shan't dwell on the fact that he, the son of a simple sexton, who went to a church school, managed to secure learned degrees and a chair at the University ; that he's now an Excellency, the son-in-law of a Senator, etc. All this is of no consequence. But do consider just this. The man has for precisely twenty-five years been lecturing and writing on art, without understanding art in the very least. Precisely for twenty-five years he has been chewing other men's ideas on realism, tendencies, and various other nonsense. For twenty-five years he has been lecturing and writing on what to sensible people has been ever so long familiar, and what to fools is of no interest ; that is, for twenty-five years he has been pouring water into a sieve. And along with that—what success ! What popularity ! Wherefore ? Why ? By what right ?

ORLOVSKY (*laughing aloud*) : It's envy, envy !

VOYNITSKY : Just so, envy ! And what success with women ! No Don Juan has known such complete success ! His first wife, my sister—a charming, gentle creature, as pure as this blue sky, noble, generous, who had more admirers than he had students—she loved him as ardently as only pure angels are capable of loving just as pure and beautiful angels as themselves. My mother,—his mother-in-law,—adores him to this very day, and he still inspires her with sacred awe. His second wife, a beautiful, clever woman,—you've seen her,—married him when he was already old, she gave him her youth, her beauty, her freedom, her brilliance . . . What for ? Why ? And she so gifted, such an artist ! How wonderfully she plays the piano !

ORLOVSKY : Altogether they are a gifted family. A rare family.

ZHELTOUKHIN : Yes, Sophie Alexandrovna, for instance, has a most remarkable voice. A wonderful soprano ! I have never heard anything like it even in Petersburg. But, you know, she rather strains her upper notes. It's a great pity. Give me the upper notes ! Give me the upper notes ! Ah, if she had those notes, I stake my life, she would be wonderful, do you know . . . I'm sorry, gentlemen, I must have a word with Julie . . . (*taking Julie aside*). Send a messenger on horseback to them. Send them a note to say that if they can't come now, at any rate, let them come to dinner . . . (*in a lower voice*). But don't be stupid, don't disgrace

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me, and write correctly. . . 'Drive' is spelt i-v-e. . . (*Aloud and tenderly*) Please, my dear !

JULIE : Certainly (*going out*).

DYADIN : They say that the professor's spouse, Elena Alexandrovna, whom I have not the honour to know, is distinguished not only by spiritual beauty, but by beauty of countenance as well.

ORLOVSKY : Just so, she's a wonderful woman.

ZHELTOUKHIN : She's faithful to her professor ?

VOYNITSKY : Unfortunately, she is.

ZHELTOUKHIN : Why unfortunately ?

VOYNITSKY : Because this faithfulness is wrong from beginning to end. There's a great deal of rhetoric, but no logic in it at all. To be unfaithful to an old husband, whom you can't bear—that's considered immoral ; but to try to suppress one's poor youth and a living feeling—that is not immoral. Damn it all, where's the logic of it ?

DYADIN (*in a tearful voice*) : Georgie dear, I don't like you to speak like this. Indeed, please, don't . . . It makes me tremble. . . . Gentlemen, I possess no talent, no flowers of eloquence, but allow me to speak out without elegant phrases, as my conscience prompts me. . . . Gentlemen, one who is unfaithful to a wife or to a husband, is a false person, a person who may be unfaithful even to his country !

VOYNITSKY : Stop the fountain !

DYADIN : But allow me, Georgie ! . . . Ivan Ivanich, Lennie, and all of you my dear friends, do take into consideration the vicissitudes of my fate. It is not a secret nor is it enveloped in the darkness of obscurity that my wife, on the day after our wedding, ran away from me with the man she loved, on account of my unattractive appearance.

VOYNITSKY : And she did quite right.

DYADIN : But listen, gentlemen ! After that incident I did not violate my duty. I love her to this very day and am faithful to her, I help her in every possible way I can, and I have bequeathed my property to the children, whom she has borne to the man she loved. I have not violated my duty, and am proud of it. Yes, I am proud ! I was deprived of happiness, but my pride remains. And she ? Her youth has gone, her beauty, under the influence of the laws of nature, has faded away, her lover is dead,—may he rest in peace. And what's left to her ? (*sitting down*) I speak seriously to you, and you laugh . . .

ORLOVSKY : You're a kind-hearted man, you've a great spirit, but your speech is too long and you wave your hands . . .

(*Fyodor Ivanovich comes out of the house. He is dressed in a poddirovka [sleeveless overcoat worn by Russian peasants] made of the finest cloth ; high boots ; his chest covered with orders, medals and a solid gold chain with trinkets ; has expensive rings on his fingers.*)

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## IV.

### THE SAME and FYODOR.

FYODOR : How do you do, old fellows !

ORLOVSKY (*joyously*) : Fyodor, my boy, darling sonnie !

FYODOR (*to Zheltoukhin*) : I congratulate you on your birthday. . . . be a big boy . . . (*greeting the whole company*). Pater ! Waffle, how d'ye do ! I wish you all a good appetite !

ZHELTOUKHIN : Where have you been wandering ? You should not come so late.

FYODOR : It's hot ! I must gulp some vodka.

ORLOVSKY (*with an admiring look at him*) : My dear fellow, what a fine beard he has . . . Friends, he's a beauty ! Look at him ; isn't he a beauty ?

FYODOR : Congratulations to the new-born ! (*drinking*) Aren't the Serebryakovs here ?

ZHELTOUKHIN : They've not come.

FYODOR : Hm . . . And where's Julie ?

ZHELTOUKHIN : I don't know where she's got to. It's time to bring in the birthday pie. I'll call her at once (*going out*).

ORLOVSKY : And our Lennie, our new-born, isn't in the right humour to-day. So sulky !

VOYNITSKY : He's a beast.

ORLOVSKY : His nerves must be upset, he can't help it . . .

VOYNITSKY : He loves himself too much, hence his nerves. If you were to say in his presence that this herring here is good, he would at once feel hurt because it was not he who was praised. Here he comes. (*Enter Julie and Zheltoukhin.*)

## V.

### THE SAME, ZHELTOUKHIN and JULIE.

JULIE : How do you do, Fyodor dear (*kissing one another*). Do have something, dear (*to Orlovsky*). Look, godpa, what a present I am giving Lennie (*showing a little shoe to serve as a watch-stand*).

ORLOVSKY : My duckie, my dear little girl, what a fine shoe ! What a fine thing !

JULIE : The gold wire-ribbon alone cost eight and a half roubles. Look at the borders : tiny little pearls, tiny little pearls, tiny little pearls. And here are the letters : ' Leonid Zheltoukhin.' Here's embroidered in silk : ' A present to him I love.' . . .

DYADIN : Do let me have a look ! That is fascinating !

FYODOR : That'll do . . . that's enough ! Julie, tell them to fetch champagne !

JULIE : Fyodor dear, that's for the evening !

FYODOR : Why, why evening ! Tell them to bring it at once, or I'll go away. 'Pon my word, I'll go away. Where do you keep it ? I'll go myself to fetch it.

JULIE : Fyodor dear, in a well-ordered house, you're always a

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nuisance. (*To Vassili*) : Vassili, here's the key ! The champagne is in the pantry, you know, in the corner, just by the bag of raisins, in a basket. Only be careful, don't break anything !

FYODOR : Vassili, three bottles !

JULIE : You'll never make a good housekeeper, Fyodor . . . (*serving out the pie to the company*). Have some more, please, gentlemen. . . . Dinner won't be yet, not till six. . . . Nothing good will come of you, Fyodor dear. . . . You're a lost creature !

FYODOR : Now, you've started preaching.

VOYNITSKY : I think someone has driven up. . . . Do you hear ?

ZHELTOUKHIN : Yes. . . . It's the Serebryakovs. . . . At last ! (*Vassili announces the Serebryakovs*.)

JULIE (*crying out*) : Sonechka ! (*running out*).

VOYNITSKY (*singing*) ' Let's go to meet them, let's go ' . . . (*going out*).

FYODOR : How overjoyed they are !

ZHELTOUKHIN : How very little tact some people possess ! He lives with the professor's wife and cannot conceal it.

FYODOR : Who does ?

ZHELTOUKHIN : George, of course. He praised her so much just now, before you came, that it was even indecent.

FYODOR : How do you know that he lives with her ?

ZHELTOUKHIN : As if I were blind. . . . Besides the whole district is talking about it.

FYODOR : Nonsense. Nobody has yet lived with her up to now, but soon I shall live with her. . . . Do you see ? I !

### VI.

THE SAME, SEREBRYAKOV, MARIE VASSILIEVNA, VOYNITSKY, with ELENA ANDREYEVNA on his arm, SONYA and JULIE.

JULIE (*kissing Sonya*) : My dear ! Darling !

ORLOVSKY (*going to meet them*) : How do you do, Alexander, how are you, old boy ? (*embracing one another*). You are well ? Quite well ?

SEREBRYAKOV : And how are you, my dear friend ! You look fine ! I am very glad to see you. How long have you been back ?

ORLOVSKY : I returned on Friday. (*To Marie Vassilievna*) Marie Vassilievna ! How are you, Your Excellency ! (*kissing her hand*).

MARIE VASSILIEVNA : My dear . . . (*kissing him on the head*).

SONYA : Dearest godpa !

ORLOVSKY : Sonechka, my darling ! (*kissing her*). My own darling, my little canary bird . . .

SONYA : As usual, your face is radiant, kindly, sweet . . .

ORLOVSKY : And you've grown taller, and handsomer, and shapelier, my sweet . . .

SONYA : How are you getting on ? Are you well ?

ORLOVSKY : Tremendously well !

SONYA : That's right, godpa ! (*to Fyodor*) I failed to notice the

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elephant (*embracing one another*). Sunburnt, hairy . . . a real spider !

JULIE : Darling !

ORLOVSKY (*to Serebryakov*) : How are you getting on, old boy ?

SERBRYAKOV : So so . . . And you ?

ORLOVSKY : What can be the matter with me ? I live ! I gave my estate to my son, my daughters are married to good men, and now there's no freer man than myself. I'm enjoying myself !

DYADIN (*to Serebryakov*) : It pleased Your Excellency to arrive a little late. The temperature of the pie has gone down considerably. Allow me to introduce myself, Ilya Ilyich Dyadin, or Waffle, as some very wittily call me on account of my pock-marked countenance.

SEREBRYAKOV : I'm very glad.

DYADIN : Madame ! Mademoiselle (*bowing to Elena and to Sonya*). Here are all my friends, Your Excellency. Once upon a time I had a considerable fortune, but for domestic reasons, or, as people in intellectual centres put it, for reasons for which the editor accepts no responsibility, I had to give up my share to my own brother who, on a certain unfortunate occasion, found himself short of seventy thousand roubles of Government money. My profession consists in the exploitation of the stormy elements. I make the stormy waves turn the wheels of a flour mill, which I rent from my friend, the Wood Demon.

VOVNITSKY : Waffle, stop the fountain !

DYADIN : I always bow down with reverence (*bowing down to the ground*) before the luminaries of science, who adorn our country's horizon. Forgive me the audacity, with which I crave to pay a visit to Your Excellency and to delight my soul in a conversation about the ultimate deductions of science.

SEREBRYAKOV : Pray, do come. I shall be pleased.

SONYA : Do tell us, godpa, where did you spend the winter ? Where did you disappear to ?

ORLOVSKY : I was in Gmunden, my sweet, I was also in Paris, in Nice ; I was in London . . .

SONYA : Splendid ! What a happy man !

ORLOVSKY : Come with me in the autumn ! Won't you ?

SONYA (*singing*) : ' Tempt me not without need ' . . .

FYODOR : Don't sing at lunch, or your husband's wife will be a silly.

DYADIN : It would be interesting now just to have a glance at this table à vol d'oiseau. What a fascinating bouquet ! A combination of grace, beauty, profound learning, popu . . .

FYODOR : What a fascinating language ! Damn you ! You speak as though someone were at work on your back with a plane . . . (*laughter*).

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ORLOVSKY (*to Sonya*) : And you, my darling, you are not yet married . . .

VOYNITSKY : Good heavens, whom could she marry ? Humboldt is dead, Edison is in America, Schopenhauer is also dead. . . . The other day I found her diary on her table : this size ! I opened it and read : " No, I shall never fall in love. . . . Love is the egotistical attraction of my ego to an object of the opposite sex." . . . . And I wonder what is not there ? Transcendental, culminating point of the integrating principle . . . ugh ! And where have you got to know all this ?

SONYA : Whoever else may be ironical, you ought not to be, Uncle George.

VOYNITSKY : Why are you cross ?

SONYA : If you say another word, one of us will have to go home. You or I . . . .

ORLOVSKY (*laughing aloud*) : What a character !

VOYNITSKY : Yes, a character indeed, I must say. . . . (*to Sonya*) Give me your little paw ! Please do ! (*kissing her hand*). Peace and goodwill. . . . I won't do it again.

### VII.

THE SAME and KHRouschov (THE WOOD DEMON).

KHRouschov (*coming out of the house*) : Why am I not a painter ? What a wonderful group !

ORLOVSKY (*joyously*) : My dear godson !

KHRouschov : My congratulations to the new-born. How do you do, Julie, how fine you look to-day ! Godpa ! (*kissing Orlovsky*). Sophie Alexandrovna . . . (*greeting the rest of the company*).

ZHELTOUKHIN : How can you be so late ? Where have you been ?

KHRouschov : At a patient's.

JULIE : The pie has gone cold.

KHRouschov : It doesn't matter, Julie, I'll eat it cold. Where shall I sit ?

SONYA : Sit down here . . . (*pointing to a seat beside her*).

KHRouschov : The weather is wonderful and I have a ravenous appetite. . . . Yes, I'll have some vodka . . . (*drinking*) To the new-born ! I'll have this little pie . . . Julie, give it a kiss, it'll taste better . . . (*she kisses it*). Merci. How are you, godpa ? I haven't seen you for a long time.

ORLOVSKY : Yes, it is a long time. I've been abroad.

KHRouschov : I heard about it . . . and envied you. And how are you, Fyodor ?

FYODOR : All right, your prayers support us, like pillars . . .

KHRouschov : How are your affairs ?

FYODOR : I must not grumble. I am having a good time. Only my dear fellow, there's a lot of running to and fro. Sickening. From here to the Caucasus, from the Caucasus back here,—con-

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tinuously on the move, until I'm dazed. You know, I've got two estates there !

KHROUSCHOV : I know.

FYODOR : I am engaged in colonisation and in catching tarantulas and scorpions. Business is going all right, but as regards " my surging passions, keep still !"—all is as it used to be.

KHOU SCHOV : You're in love, of course ?

FYODOR : On which account, Wood Demon, we must have a drink (*drinking*) . . . Gentlemen, never fall in love with married women ! My word, it's better to be wounded in the shoulder and shot through the leg, like your obedient servant, than to love a married woman . . . It's such a misfortune . . .

SONYA : Is it hopeless ?

FYODOR : Hopeless indeed ! Hopeless . . . In this world there's nothing hopeless. Hopeless, unhappy love, oh ! ach !—all this is just nonsense ! One has only to will . . . If I will that my gun should not miss fire, it won't. If I will a woman to love me, she shall love me. Just so, Sonya, old chap ! If I pick out a woman, I think it's easier for her to jump to the moon than to get away from me.

SONYA : What a terrific fellow !

FYODOR : She won't get away from me ! I hardly have time to say three words to her before she's already in my power. . . . Yes. . . . I have only to say to her : " My lady, whenever you look at the window you must remember me. I will it." And she remembers me a thousand times a day. Moreover, I bombard her every day with letters . . .

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Letters surely aren't a safe method ; she may receive them, but she may not read them.

FYODOR : You think so ? Hm . . . I have been living in this world for thirty-five years, and somehow I haven't yet come across such phenomenal women as would have the courage not to open a letter.

ORLOVSKY (*looking admiringly at him*) : See ! My dear son, my beautiful son ! I, too, was like that. Precisely, to a degree ! Only that I was not in the war ; but I drank and threw money about—terrible !

FYODOR : Misha, I do love her, seriously, hellishly . . . Were she only to agree, I would just give her everything and all . . . I would carry her to the Caucasus, to the mountains, we should live like singing birds. . . . I should, Elena Andreyevna, guard her, like a faithful dog, and she would be to me as the marshal of nobility sings : " Thou wilt be the queen of the universe, thou my dearest." Oh, she does not know how very happy she could be !

KHROUSCHOV : And who's that lucky woman ?

FYODOR : If you know too much, you'll age quickly . . . But enough about that. Now, let's sing from a different opera. I remem-

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ber, it's about ten years ago—Lennie was still at school then—we were celebrating his birthday as we are now. I rode home—Sonya on my right arm, and Julie on my left, and both held on to my beard. Now, let's drink the health of the friends of my youth, of Sonya and Julie !

DYADIN (*laughing aloud*) : That is fascinating ! That is fascinating !

FYODOR : Once, it was after the war, I was having drinks with a Turkish Pasha in Trebisond. . . All at once he asks me . . .

DYADIN (*interrupting*) : Let's drink a toast to friendly relations. *Vivat* friendship ! Here's luck !

FYODOR : Stop, stop, stop ! Sonya, I claim attention ! I am having a bet, damn it ! I am putting three hundred roubles on the table ! Let's go after lunch to play croquet, and I bet that in one round I shall get through all the hoops and back.

SONYA : I accept the bet ; only I haven't got three hundred roubles.

FYODOR : If you lose, you are to sing to me forty times.

SONYA : Agreed.

DYADIN : That is fascinating ! That is fascinating !

ELENA ANDREYEVNA (*looking at the sky*) : What bird is that ?

ZHELTOUKHIN : It is a hawk.

FYODOR : Friends, let's drink the hawk's health !

(Sonya *laughs aloud*.)

ORLOVSKY : Now, she has started ! What's the matter ?

(Khrouschov *laughs aloud*.)

ORLOVSKY : Why are you laughing ?

MARIE VASSILIEVNA : Sophie ! It is not right !

KHROUSCHOV : Oh, I am so sorry . . . I'll stop presently, presently . . .

ORLOVSKY : This is laughing without reason.

VOYNITSKY : Those two, you've only to lift up your finger, and they burst out laughing. Sonya ! (*lifting his finger*). Look, now . . .

KHROUSCHOV : Stop it ! (*looking at his watch*). Well, I have eaten and drunk, and now I must be off. It's time I went.

SONYA : Where to ?

KHROUSCHOV : To a patient. I'm as tired of my medical practice as of an unloved wife, or a long winter . . .

SEREBRYAKOV : But, look here, medicine is your profession, your work, so to say . . .

VOYNITSKY (*ironically*) : He has another profession. He digs peat on his estate.

SEREBRYAKOV : What ?

VOYNITSKY : Peat ! A mining engineer has calculated with absolute certainty that there is peat on his land worth seven hundred and twenty thousand roubles. It isn't a joke.

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KHROUSCHOV : I don't dig peat for the sake of money.

VOYNITSKY : Why do you dig it then ?

KHROUSCHOV : In order that you should not cut down forests.

VOYNITSKY : Why not cut them ? To hear you, one might think that forests only existed for the courtships of youths and maidens.

KHROUSCHOV : I never said anything of the sort.

VOYNITSKY : What I have had the honour of hearing you say up to now in defence of forests, is all antiquated, not serious, and tendentious. Pray, forgive me. I say this not without grounds, I know almost by heart all your arguments in defence. . . . For instance . . . (*raising the tone of his voice and gesticulating, as though imitating Khrouschov*). You men, are destroying the forests, but they adorn the earth, they teach man to understand beauty and inspire him with a sense of majesty. Forests soften harsh climates. Where the climate is milder, there man exerts less effort in his struggle with nature, and therefore man there is gentler and kindlier. In countries with a mild climate people are handsome, alert, easily excited, their speech is elegant, their movements graceful. Arts and science flourish there, their philosophy is not gloomy, their relations to women are full of fine courtesy. And so on and so on. . . . All this is fine, but so unconvincing that you must allow me to go on burning wood in the fireplaces and building wooden barns.

KHROUSCHOV : Cut forests, when it is a matter of urgency, you may, but it is time to stop destroying them. Every Russian forest is cracking under the axe, millions of trees are perishing, the abodes of beasts and birds are being ravaged, rivers are becoming shallow and drying up, wonderful landscapes are disappearing without leaving a trace; and all this because lazy man has not got the sense to stoop to pick up fuel from the ground. One must be a barbarian (*pointing to the trees*) to burn that beauty in the fireplace, to destroy what we cannot create. Understanding and creative power have been granted to man to multiply what has been given him, but hitherto he has not created, he has only destroyed. The forests grow less and less, the rivers dry up, wild birds disappear, the climate is spoilt, and every day the earth grows poorer and uglier. You look at me ironically, and all I am saying seems to you antiquated and not serious, but when I pass by woods belonging to the peasants, woods which I have saved from being cut down, or when I hear the rustling of the young forest, which I have planted with my own hands, I realise that the climate is to a certain extent also in my power ; and if a thousand years hence man is to be happy, I too shall have had a share in it. When I plant a little birch tree and then see how it is growing green and shaking in the wind, my soul is filled with pride from the realisation that, thanks to me, there is one more life added on earth . . .

FYODOR (*interrupting*) : Your health, Wood Demon !

## THE WOOD DEMON

VOYNITSKY : All this is very fine, but if you looked at the matter not from a novelette point of view, but from a scientific point of view, then . . .

SONYA : Uncle George, your tongue is covered with rust. Do keep quiet !

KHROUSCHOV : Indeed, George Petrovich, let's not discuss it. Please.

VOYNITSKY : As you like !

MARIE VASSILIEVNA : Ah !

SONYA : Grannie, what's the matter ?

MARIE VASSILIEVNA (*to Serebryakov*) : I had forgotten to tell you, Alexander. . . I'm losing my memory. . . . I had a letter to-day from Kharkov, from Paul Alexeyevich . . . He asks to be remembered to you. . . .

SEREBRYAKOV : Thank you, I am very glad.

MARIE VASSILIEVNA : He sent me his new pamphlet and asked me to show it to you.

SEREBRYAKOV : Is it interesting ?

MARIE VASSILIEVNA : It is interesting, but somewhat odd. He refutes what he himself was defending seven years ago. It is very, very typical of our time. Never have people betrayed their convictions with such levity as they do now. It is terrible !

VOYNITSKY : There's nothing terrible. Won't you have some fish, maman ?

MARIE VASSILIEVNA : But I want to speak !

VOYNITSKY : We have been talking for the last fifty years about tendencies and schools ; it's time we stopped.

MARIE VASSILIEVNA : It does not please you for some reason when I speak. Excuse me, George, but this last year you have changed so much that I can't make you out at all. You used to be a man of definite conviction, an enlightened personality . . .

VOYNITSKY : Oh ,yes ! I was an "enlightened personality" from which no one got more light. Permit me to get up. I was an "enlightened personality." A more venomous joke couldn't have been uttered ! Now I am forty-seven. Up till last year I was deliberately trying, like you, to fog my eyes with all sorts of abstractions and scholasticism, in order not to see real life ; and I thought that I was doing the right thing . . . But now, if only you knew, what a great fool I seem to myself for having so stupidly let slip the time when I might have had everything, everything which my old age denies me now !

SEREBRYAKOV : Look here ! George, you seem to blame your former convictions for something . . .

SONYA : Enough, papa ! It's dull !

SEREBRYAKOV : Look here ! You, as it were, blame your former convictions for something. But it is not they, it's yourself who is at

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fault. You forgot that convictions without deeds are dead. You ought to have been at work.

VOYNITSKY : Work ? Not everyone is capable of being a writing *perpetuum mobile*.

SEREBRYAKOV : What do you mean to convey by that ?

VOYNITSKY : Nothing. Let's stop the conversation. We aren't at home.

MARIE VASSILIEVNA : I am completely losing my memory. . . . I forgot to remind you, Alexander, to take your drops before lunch ; I brought them with me, but forgot to remind you.

SEREBRYAKOV : You need not.

MARIE VASSILIEVNA : But you are ill, Alexander ! You're very ill !

SEREBRYAKOV : Why make a fuss about it ? Old, ill, old, ill . . . that's the only thing I hear ! (*to Zheltoukhin*) Leonid Stepanovich, allow me to get up and to go into the house. It is rather hot here and the mosquitoes are biting.

ZHELTOUKHIN : Please do. We've finished lunch.

SEREBRYAKOV : Thank you (*going into the house* ; *Marie Vassilieva following him*).

JULIE (*to her brother*) : Go to the professor ! It's awkward !

ZHELTOUKHIN (*to her*) : Damn him ! (*going out*).

DYADIN : Yulia Stepanovna, allow me to thank you from the bottom of my soul (*kissing her hand*).

JULIE : Don't mention it, Ilya Ilyich ! You've eaten so little . . . (*the company getting up and thanking her*). Don't mention it ! You've all eaten so little !

FYODOR : What are we going to do now ? Let's go to the croquet lawn now and settle our bet . . . and then ?

JULIE : And then we shall have dinner.

FYODOR : And then ?

KHROUSCHOV : And then you all come to me. In the evening we'll arrange a fishing party on the lake.

FYODOR : Splendid !

DYADIN : That is fascinating !

SONYA : Well, it's settled then. It means we are going now to the croquet lawn to settle our bet . . . Then Julie will give us an early dinner, and about seven we'll drive over to the Wood . . . I mean to Mr. Khrouschov. Splendid ! Come, Julie, let's get the balls (*going with Julie into the house*).

FYODOR : Vassili, carry the wine to the lawn ! We shall drink the health of the conquerors. Now, pater, come and let's have a noble game.

ORLOVSKY : Wait a while, my own, I must sit with the professor for a few minutes, for it's a bit awkward. One must keep up appearances. You play my ball for a while, I'll come presently . . . (*going into the house*).

## THE WOOD DEMON

DYADIN : I am going to listen to the most learned Alexander Vladimirovich. In anticipation of the high delight, which . . .

VOYNITSKY : You're a bore, Waffle. Go away.

DYADIN : I am going (*going into the house*).

FYODOR (*walking into the garden, singing*) : "Thou wilt be the queen of the universe, thou my dearest" . . . (*going out*).

KHROUSCHOV : I'll leave quietly. (*to Voynitsky*) George Petrovich, I earnestly ask you, let us never talk either of forests, or of medicine. I don't know why, but when you start discussing these matters, I have a feeling all day afterwards as if I had eaten my dinner out of rusty pots. Allow me ! (*going out*).

### VIII.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA and VOYNITSKY.

VOYNITSKY : The narrow-minded fellow. Everyone is permitted to say stupid things, but I dislike it when it is done with pathos.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : You have again behaved impossibly, George ! Why need you have argued with Marie Vassilievna and Alexander, and spoken about *perpetuum mobile* ! How petty it is !

VOYNITSKY : But if I hate him ?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : There's nothing to hate Alexander for ; he's like all the rest . . .

(*Sonya and Julie pass into the garden with balls and mallets for croquet.*)

VOYNITSKY : If you could see the expression on your face, your movements . . . You're too lazy to live ! Oh, what laziness !

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Oh, lazy, boring !! (*after a pause*). Everyone scoffs at my husband before my eyes, without minding my presence. Everyone looks at me with compassion : "Poor woman, she has an old husband !" All, even very kind people, would like me to leave Alexander. . . . That sympathy, all those compassionate glances and sighs of pity come simply to this. As the Wood Demon has just said, all of you nonsensically destroy forests, and soon none will be left on the earth. Just as nonsensically do you all destroy man, and soon, thanks to you, there will remain on earth neither faithfulness, nor purity, nor the capacity for self-sacrifice. Why can't you look unconcernedly at a faithful wife, if she's not yours ? The Wood Demon is right. There's lurking in all of you a demon of destruction. You spare neither forests, nor birds, nor women, nor one another.

VOYNITSKY : I don't love this philosophy !

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Tell that Fyodor that his impudence bores me. It's loathsome in the end. To look into my eyes and to speak aloud in the presence of all about his love for a married woman,—how wonderfully witty !

(*Voices in the garden. Bravo ! Bravo !*)

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : But how nice the Wood Demon is ! He

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often comes to us, but I'm shy and have never talked to him, as I should have liked to ; I did not make a friend of him. He may think that I am ill-natured or proud. George, probably you and I are such good friends because we both are dull and bore people ! Bores ! Don't look at me like that, I don't like it.

VOYNITSKY : But how else can I look at you, if I love you ? You are my happiness, my life, my youth ! . . . I know that the chances of your returning my love are nil, but I want nothing more, only allow me to look at you, to hear your voice. . . .

## IX.

### THE SAME and SEREBRYAKOV.

SEREBRYAKOV (*in the window*) : Elena dear, where are you ?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : I'm here.

SEREBRYAKOV : Come and sit with us awhile, dear . . . (*disappearing*).

(*Elena Andreyevna goes into the house.*)

VOYNITSKY (*following her*) : Allow me to speak of my love, don't drive me away, and this alone will be my greatest happiness.

(*Curtain.*)

## ACT II.

*The dining-room of the Serebryakovs' house. A sideboard, a dinner table in the middle of the room. Time : after one o'clock at night. From the garden comes the sound of the night watchman's knocks.*

### I.

SEREBRYAKOV (*sitting in a chair in front of the window and dozing*) and ELENA ANDREYEVNA (*sitting near by and also dozing*).

SEREBRYAKOV (*awaking*) : Who's here ? Is it you, Sonya ?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : It's me . . .

SEREBRYAKOV : You, Lena dear. . . . The pain is excruciating !

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Your rug is on the floor . . . (*wrapping it round his legs*). I'll shut the window, Alexander.

SEREBRYAKOV : No, don't, I'm hot . . . I had just fallen into a doze and dreamed that my left leg did not belong to me. . . . I awoke with excruciating pain. No, it's not gout, I think it is rheumatism. What's the time now ?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Twenty past one. (*A pause.*)

SEREBRYAKOV : Have a look in the morning, in the library, for Batyushkov. I believe we've got his collected articles.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : What ?

SEREBRYAKOV : Have a look for Batyushkov in the morning. I remember seeing the volume here. But why am I breathing with such difficulty ?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : You're tired. It's the second night now you haven't slept.

## THE WOOD DEMON

SEREBRYAKOV : They say that Turgenev's gout has developed into *angina pectoris*. I am afraid that this will happen in my case too. Cursed, loathsome old age ! Curse it ! Since I've grown old I've become disgusting to myself. And to all of you I must present a disgusting spectacle.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : You speak of your old age in such a tone as if we all are to blame for your growing old.

SEREBRYAKOV : You are the first to be disgusted by me.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : How dull ! (*moving away and sitting down at some distance*).

SEREBRYAKOV : Of course, you're right. I'm not a fool and quite understand. You're young, healthy, handsome, you're eager for life ; and I am an old man, almost a corpse. Well ? Don't I realise it all ? And, of course, it is foolish of me to be still alive. But wait a little while, I'll free you all soon.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Alexander, it's crushing me ! If I deserve any reward for the sleepless nights, I ask only this from you : be quiet ! For the love of Christ, be quiet ! I ask for nothing else.

SEREBRYAKOV : It comes to this then, that, thanks to me, all of you have become crushed, and are bored and are wasting your youth ; and I am the only one who is enjoying life and is content. Just so, of course !

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Be quiet ! You've worn me out !

SEREBRYAKOV : I have worn out everyone. Of course !

ELENA ANDREYEVNA (*crying*) : It's unbearable ! Tell me what you want from me ?

SEREBRYAKOV : Nothing.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Be quiet, then, I beg.

SEREBRYAKOV : Isn't it curious, if George or that old idiot Marie Vassilievna starts speaking, it seems all right ; everybody listens to them. But if I say a single word, everybody begins to feel distressed. Even my voice is disgusting. Well, let us suppose I am disgusting, I am an egotist, I am a despot ; but indeed haven't I, even in my old age, a certain right to egotism ? Haven't I indeed deserved it ? My life has been hard. I and Orlovsky were undergraduates together. Ask him. He had a good time, and went about with gipsy women ; he was my benefactor ; and I at that time lived in a cheap, dirty room, I worked day and night, like an ox, I starved and worried because I lived at someone else's expense. Then I went to Heidelberg University, but I saw nothing of Heidelberg ; I went to Paris, but I saw nothing of Paris,—all the time I sat within four walls and worked. And since I became professor, and all through my life, I have served science, as they say, with faith and truth, as I am still serving her. Indeed, for all this, I ask you, have not I the right to a peaceful old age, to some consideration from people ?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Nobody disputes your right. (*The*

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*window is blown by the wind.)* The wind is getting up ; I'll shut the window (*shutting it*). It's going to rain presently. . . . Nobody disputes your rights. (*A pause. Outside the night watchman knocks and sings a song.*)

SEREBRYAKOV : To work all one's life long for science, to get accustomed to one's study, to one's audience, to respected colleagues, and then all of a sudden, without rhyme or reason, to find oneself in this sepulchre, to have to see stupid people, day in and day out to hear trivial conversations ! I want to live, I love success, I love popularity, noise ; but here I am—in exile. Every minute pining for the past, watching the successes of others, afraid of death ! . . . I cannot ! I haven't the strength ! And here some people won't even forgive me my old age !

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Wait a while, have patience : in five or six years time I too shall be old.

(Enter Sonya.)

## II.

### THE SAME and SONYA.

SONYA : I wonder why the doctor has not come yet. I told Stepan if the Zemstvo doctor was out, to drive over and fetch the Wood Demon.

SEREBRYAKOV : Of what use is your Wood Demon to me ? He understands as much about medicine as I do about astronomy.

SONYA : You don't want us to call in the whole medical faculty to treat your gout ?

SEREBRYAKOV : I am not even going to talk to that crazy fellow.

SONYA : Just as you please (*sitting down*). I don't mind.

SEREBRYAKOV : What's the time now ?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Not yet two.

SEREBRYAKOV : It's stifling here. . . . Sonya, give me the medicine on the table.

SONYA : Certainly (*handing him the medicine*).

SEREBRYAKOV (*irritably*) : Ah, not this one. It's no use asking for anything !

SONYA : Please, don't be capricious ! Some may like it, but pray spare me. I don't like it.

SEREBRYAKOV : That girl has an impossible character. Why are you cross ?

SONYA : And why do you speak in such a mournful tone ! Some one might think that you are actually unhappy. Yet there are very few people as happy as you are.

SEREBRYAKOV : Just so, of course ! I am very, very happy.

SONYA : Certainly, you're happy. . . . And if you have gout, you know perfectly well that the attack will pass by the morning. Why grieve then ? Why make a fuss ?

(Enter Voynitsky in a dressing gown, with a candle.)

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## III.

### THE SAME and VOYNITSKY.

VOYNITSKY : There's a storm coming on. (*A flash of lightning.*) I say ! Elena and Sonya, go to bed ; I'll take your place here.

SEREBRYAKOV (*frightened*) : No, no, don't leave me with him ! No, he'll talk my head off.

VOYNITSKY : But they need a rest ! They've not slept for two nights.

SEREBRYAKOV : Let them go to bed, but you too must go away. Thank you. I implore you to go. In the name of our past friendship, don't refuse me. We will have a talk some other time.

VOYNITSKY : Our past friendship ! . . . This, I must say, is news to me.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Be quiet, George.

SEREBRYAKOV : My dear, don't leave me with him ! He'll talk my head off.

VOYNITSKY : It is getting ridiculous.

KHROUSCHOV's voice (*behind the scene*) : They're in the dining-room ? Here ? Please, attend to my horse !

VOYNITSKY : The doctor has come.

(Enter Khrouschov.)

## IV.

### THE SAME and KHROUSCHOV.

KHROUSCHOV : What weather ! The rain ran after me, but I just managed to escape it. How do you do ! (*greeting them*).

SEREBRYAKOV : I'm sorry we troubled you. I did not want it at all.

KHROUSCHOV : Never mind, it's perfectly all right ! But what's the matter with you, Alexander Vladimirovich ? Aren't we ashamed of being seedy ? Oh, we mustn't ! What's wrong ?

SEREBRYAKOV : Why do doctors always speak to patients in a condescending tone ?

KHROUSCHOV (*laughing*) : Well, you shouldn't be so observant . . . (*in a gentle voice*). Won't you lie down on your bed ? You aren't comfortable here. In bed you'll be warmer and more restful. Come . . . I will examine you there . . . and everything will be all right.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Do as the doctor says, Alexander. Do go.

KHROUSCHOV : If you find it hard to walk, we will move you there in your chair.

SEREBRYAKOV : I can manage. . . . I'll walk . . . (*getting up*). Only they should not have troubled you. (*Khrouschov and Sonya supporting him under the arm*.) Besides, I don't very much believe in . . . pharmacy. Why are you supporting me ? . . . I can walk by myself. (*Going out with Khrouschov and Sonya*.)

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## V.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA and VOYNITSKY.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : I'm worn out by him. I can hardly stand.

VOYNITSKY : You're worn out by him, and I'm worn out by myself. I've not slept for three nights.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : There's something wrong about this house. Your mother hates everything, except her little books and the professor. The professor is irritable ; he doesn't trust me ; he's afraid of you. Sonya is cross with her father and does not speak to me ; you hate my husband and openly despise your mother ; my boring self, I too am irritated, and to-day I was twenty times on the point of crying. In a word, it's a war of all against all. What's the sense of that war, what's it for ?

VOYNITSKY : Don't let us philosophise !

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : There's something wrong about this house. You, George, are well educated, intelligent, and it seems that you ought to understand that the world perishes not because of murderers and thieves, but from hidden hatred, from hostility among good people, from all those petty squabbles, unseen by those who call our house a haven of intellectuals. Do help me to reconcile everyone ! Alone I cannot do it !

VOYNITSKY : You first reconcile me to myself ! My dear . . . (clinging to her hand).

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : You must not ! (withdrawing her hand). Go away !

VOYNITSKY : The rain will pass presently, and everything in nature will be refreshed and breathe freely. I alone shall not be refreshed by the storm. Day and night I am haunted and oppressed by the idea that my life has been wasted irretrievably. I have no past, it was all stupidly thrown away on trifles ; and the present is terrible in its absurdity. Here's my life and love : what shall I do with them, what use can I make of them ? My feelings are wasted, like a sunbeam that falls into a ditch, and I myself am wasted. . . .

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : When you speak to me of your love, I grow stupid and don't know what to say. Forgive me, I can't say anything to you (making to go). Good night !

VOYNITSKY (barring her way) : If only you knew how I suffer from the thought that side by side with me in this house another life is being wasted—your own ! What are you waiting for ? What cursed philosophy stands in your way ? Understand, the highest morality does not consist in putting fetters on your youth and in trying to suppress your thirst for life. . . .

ELENA ANDREYEVNA (looking fixedly at him) : George, you're drunk !

VOYNITSKY : Maybe, maybe. . . .

## THE WOOD DEMON

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Is Fyodor Ivanovich stopping here with you ?

VOYNITSKY : He's stopping the night with me. Maybe, maybe. . . . Anything may be !

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : And you've been drinking together to-day ? Why did you do it ?

VOYNITSKY : At any rate it resembles life. . . . Don't take it away from me, Elena !

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Formerly you never used to drink, and you never talked so much, as you do now. Go to bed ! You bore me. And tell your Fyodor Ivanovich that if he does not cease worrying me I will take steps to stop him ! Go !

VOYNITSKY (*clinging to her hand*) : My dear . . . Dearest !

(Enter *Khrouschov*.)

### VI.

THE SAME and KHROUSCHOV.

KHROUSCHOV : Elena Andreyevna, Alexander Vladimorivich is asking for you.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA (*tearing away her hand from Voynitsky*) : In a moment ! (*going out*).

KHROUSCHOV (*to Voynitsky*) : Nothing is sacred to you ! You and the dear lady who has just gone out ought to remember that her husband was once the husband of your own sister, and that there is a young girl living under the same roof ! The whole district is speaking of the affair. What a disgrace ! (*going out to the patient*).

VOYNITSKY (*alone*) : She's gone . . . (*after a pause*). Ten years ago I used to meet her at the house of my dead sister. She was seventeen then, and I thirty-seven. Why didn't I fall in love with her then and propose to her ? It was all so possible ! She would now be my wife. . . . Yes. . . . We two would now be awakened by the storm. Frightened of the thunder, she would cling to me, and I should keep her in my embrace and whisper : "Don't be afraid, I am here with you." Oh, wonderful thoughts ! How fine ! I laugh even. . . . But, my God, my ideas are getting mixed. . . . Why am I old ? Why does she not understand me ? Her rhetoric, her lazy morality, her absurd lazy ideas of the world's ruin—all this is profoundly hateful to me . . . (*a pause*). Why am I so wrongly made ? How much I envy that gay dog Fyodor, or that silly Wood Demon ! They're direct, sincere, silly. . . . They're free from this cursed, poisonous irony. . . .

(Enter *Fyodor Ivanovich, wrapped in a blanket*.)

### VII.

VOYNITSKY and FYODOR IVANOVICH.

FYODOR (*in the doorway*) : Are you by yourself ? No ladies present ? (*entering*). I was awakened by the storm. Glorious rain. What's the time ?

VOYNITSKY : The time be damned !

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FYODOR : I fancy I heard the voice of Elena Andreyevna.

VOYNITSKY : She was here just now.

FYODOR : Magnificent woman ! (*examining the medicines on the table*). What's that ? Peppermint lozenges ? (*tasting*). Yes, a magnificent woman. . . . Is the professor ill, or what ?

VOYNITSKY : He's ill.

FYODOR : I can't understand such an existence. They say that the ancient Greeks used to throw their weak and ailing children into the abyss from Mont Blanc. Such as he ought to be thrown down too !

VOYNITSKY (*irritably*) : Not Mont Blanc, but the Tarpeian rock. What crass ignorance !

FYODOR : Well, if it's a rock, let it be a rock. . . . As if it damned well mattered ! Why are you so gloomy now ? Are you sorry for the professor, are you ?

VOYNITSKY : Let me alone (*a pause*).

FYODOR : Or perhaps you are in love with Mme. Professor ? Eh ? Why, that's right. . . . Sigh for her. . . . Only listen : if in the rumours which are circulating in the district there's a hundredth part of truth, and if I find it out, then don't ask for mercy, I'll throw you down from the Tarpeian rock.

VOYNITSKY : She's my friend !

FYODOR : Already ?

VOYNITSKY : What you do mean by "already" ?

FYODOR : A woman can be a man's friend only on this condition : first she's his acquaintance, then his mistress, and only then his friend.

VOYNITSKY : What a coarse philosophy !

FYODOR : On which account let's have a drink. Come, I think I've still got a bottle of chartreuse. We'll drink. And when the dawn comes, we will drive over to my place. Agreed ? (*seeing Sonya enter*). Oh, heavens, excuse my not having a tie on ! (*runs out*).

### VIII.

VOYNITSKY and SONYA.

SONYA : And you, uncle George, have been drinking champagne again with Fyodor and driving about with him in a troika. The bright birds singing together ! Well, Fyodor is a downright and born rake ; but you, what makes you behave like that ? At your time of life it does not at all become you.

VOYNITSKY : Time of life has nothing to do with it. If there's no real life, one lives by illusions. Anyhow, it's better than nothing.

SONYA : The hay hasn't been gathered in, Guerasim said to-day that the rain would rot it away, and you are busy with illusions (*frightened*). Uncle, there are tears in your eyes !

VOYNITSKY : Tears ? Not a bit . . . nonsense ! . . . You just

## THE WOOD DEMON

looked at me as your dead mother used to look. My dear . . . (*eagerly kissing her hands and face*). My sister . . . my sweet sister. . . . Where is she now? If she knew! Oh, if only she knew!

SONYA: What? If she knew what, Uncle?

VOYNITSKY: It is hard, bad . . . (*enter Khrouschov*). No matter. . . . I'll tell you afterwards. . . . I'll go . . . (*going out*).

### IX.

SONYA and KHROUSCHOV.

KHROUSCHOV: Your father refuses to listen to anything. I tell him it's gout, and he says it's rheumatism; I ask him to lie down, and he sits up (*taking his hat*). Nerves.

SONYA: He's spoilt. Put away your hat. Wait till the rain stops. Won't you have something to eat?

KHROUSCHOV: I think I will.

SONYA: I love to have something to eat at night. I believe there must be something in the sideboard . . . (*rummaging there*). He does not need a doctor. What he needs is to have round him a dozen ladies gazing into his eyes and sighing "Professor, Professor!" Here's some cheese. . . .

KHROUSCHOV: You ought not to speak of your father like that. I agree, he's a difficult person; but if you compare him with the others, all these Uncle Georges and Orlovskys aren't worth his little finger.

SONYA: Here's a bottle of something. . . . I'm not speaking of my father, but of the great man. I love my father, but I'm sick of great men with their Chinese ceremonies . . . (*they sit down*). What a downpour! (*a flash*). Oh!

KHROUSCHOV: The storm is passing away, it's only on the borders of the estate. . . .

SONYA (*pouring out*): Here you are!

KHROUSCHOV: May you live to be a hundred! (*drinking*).

SONYA: You are cross because we have troubled you in the night?

KHROUSCHOV: On the contrary. If you had not called me in, I should be sleeping now, and to see you in the flesh is much more pleasant than to see you in a dream.

SONYA: Why, then, do you look so cross?

KHROUSCHOV: Because I am cross. There's nobody about here, so I can speak frankly. With what pleasure, Sophie Alexandrovna, I would carry you away from here this very minute. I can't breathe this air here, and it seems to me that it is poisoning you. Your father, completely absorbed in his gout and in his books, and refusing to take notice of anything else; that Uncle George; finally, your step-mother. . . .

SONYA: What about my step-mother?

KHROUSCHOV: One can't speak of everything . . . one can't!

## THE CALENDAR.

My dear, there's a great deal which I don't understand in people. In a human being everything should be beautiful: the face, the clothes, the soul, the thoughts. . . . Often I see a beautiful face and clothes, so beautiful that my head gets giddy with rapture; but as for the soul and thoughts, my God! In a beautiful envelope there's sometimes hidden such a black soul, that no whitening can rub it off. . . . Forgive me, I'm agitated. . . . Indeed you are infinitely dear to me. . . .

SONYA (*dropping a knife*): I've dropped it. . . .

KHROUSCHOV (*picking it up*): That's all right. . . . (*after a pause*). One happens sometimes to walk on a dark night in a forest, and when one sees a light gleaming far away in the distance, one's soul is filled with such joy that one cares nothing for the fatigue, for the darkness, or for the prickly branches stinging one's face. . . . I work from morning till late at night; winter and summer I know no rest, I fight with those who do not understand me, at times I suffer intolerably. . . . But at last I've found my little light. . . . I shan't boast that I love you above all on earth. Love to me is not everything in life. . . . love is my reward. My dear, my glorious, there is no higher reward to one who works, struggles, suffers. . . .

SONYA (*in agitation*): I'm sorry. . . . One question, Mikhail Lvovich!

KHROUSCHOV: What? Ask it quickly. . . .

SONYA: You see. . . . You often come to our house, and I sometimes go with my people to yours. Do own that you can't forgive yourself for it. . . .

KHROUSCHOV: What do you mean?

SONYA: I mean, I want to say, that your democratic sentiment is offended by your being close friends with us. I have studied at the Institute, Elena Andreyevna is an aristocrat, we dress fashionably; and you are a democrat. . . .

KHROUSCHOV: Why. . . . why. . . . let's not speak about that! It isn't the time!

SONYA: You yourself dig peat, plant trees. . . . it's somewhat strange. . . . To be brief, in a word, you're a socialist. . . .

KHROUSCHOV: Democrat, socialist. . . . Sophie Alexandrovna, how can you speak of it seriously and even with a tremble in your voice?

SONYA: Yes, yes, seriously, a thousand times seriously.

KHROUSCHOV: But you can't, you can't. . . .

SONYA: I assure you, I swear, that if, for instance, I had a sister and you fell in love with her and proposed to her, you would never forgive it yourself, and you would be ashamed to show yourself to your Zemstvo men and women doctors. You would feel ashamed of having married an aristocratic girl, a "muslined young lady," who has never learnt to do any useful work, and who dresses

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fashionably. I know it quite well. . . . I see in your eyes that it's true! In a word, to be brief, these forests of yours, this peat of yours, your embroidered blouse—all this is an affectation, play-acting, a falsehood and nothing else!

KHROUSCHOV: Why? My child, why have you insulted me? . . . Yet, I am a fool. It serves me right. I shouldn't have intruded where I was not welcome! Good-bye (*going to the door*).

SONYA: Forgive me. . . . I was blunt, I apologise.

KHROUSCHOV (*returning*): If you knew how oppressive and stifling it is here! A set of persons who approach everyone sideways, look at a man askance, and try to make him out a socialist, a psychopath, a phrase-monger, anything you like, save a human being. "Oh, he's a psychopath!" and they're satisfied. "He's a phrasemonger," and they're delighted, as though they had discovered America. And when people don't understand me and don't know what label to stick on my forehead, they blame not themselves for this, but me, and say: "He's a queer fellow, odd!" You're not twenty yet, but you are already old and sober-minded, like your father and Uncle George; and I shouldn't in the least be surprised if you were to call me in to cure you of gout. One can't live like that! Whoever I am, look straight into my eyes, candidly, without reservations, without programmes, and above all try to see me as a human being; otherwise in your relations to people there will never be any peace. Good-bye! And remember my words, with such cunning, suspicious eyes as yours, you will never love! . . .

SONYA: It is untrue!

KHROUSCHOV: It is true!

SONYA: It's untrue! Just to spite you. . . . I do love you! I love, and it pains me, it pains me! Leave me alone! Go away, I implore . . . don't come to our house . . . don't come. . . .

KHROUSCHOV: Allow me then! (*going out*).

SONYA (*alone*): He got angry. God forbid I should have a temper like his! (*After a pause.*) He speaks admirably, but who can guarantee that it is not phrase-mongering? He constantly thinks of forests, he plants trees. . . . It is all very well, but it is quite possible that all this is psychopathical . . . (*covering her face with her hands*). I cannot make out anything! (*crying*). He has studied medicine, and yet his deepest interests lie outside medicine. . . . It's all strange, strange. . . . Lord, help me to think it all out!

(Enter Elena Andreyevna.)

### X.

SONYA and ELENA ANDREYEVNA.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA (*opening the windows*): The storm's over! The air is so wonderfully fresh! (*after a pause*). Where's the Wood Demon?

SONYA: He's gone.

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ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Sophie !

SONYA : Well ?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : How long are you going to be cross with me ? We've done no wrong to one another. Why be enemies ? It's time we stopped. . . .

SONYA : I myself had wished . . . (*embracing her*). Dear !

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Splendid . . . (*both are agitated*).

SONYA : Has papa gone to bed ?

ELENA : No, he's sitting in the drawing room. . . . You and I don't speak to one another for a month on end—God knows why. It's time at last to stop it. . . . (*looking at the table*). What is it ?

SONYA : The Wood Demon supped here.

ELENA : And there's wine too. . . . Let's drink friendship.

SONYA : Yes, please.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : From the same glass . . . (*pouring out wine*). It's much better like that. From now on we say *thou* to one another. Thou !

SONYA : Thou ! (*they drink and embrace*). I have long wished to make peace, but I felt shy . . . (*crying*).

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Why are you crying then ?

SONYA : For no reason, just so.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : You must not, you must not . . . (*crying*). You queer creature, I too have started crying ! (*After a pause*.) You are cross with me because you seem to think that I married your father from calculation. If you believe my vow, I vow that I married him for love. It was the scholar and famous man in him by whom I was infatuated. My love was not real love, it was artificial ; but indeed it seemed to me that it was real. I am not to blame. And you, from the very day of our marriage, have punished me with your cunning, suspicious eyes. . . .

SONYA : Come, peace, peace ! Let us forget. This is the second time to-day that I've heard that I have cunning, suspicious eyes.

ELENA : One must not look at life so cunningly. It does not suit you at all. One must trust, otherwise life's impossible.

SONYA : "A frightened crow fears the bush." I had so often been disillusioned.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : In whom ? Your father is a good, honest man, a worker. To-day you reproved him for being happy. If he indeed were happy, absorbed in his work, he did not notice his happiness. I have done no deliberate wrong either to your father or to you. Uncle George is a very nice, honest, but unhappy, dissatisfied man. . . . Whom, then, do you not trust ? (*after a pause*).

SONYA : Tell me truly, as a friend. . . . Are you happy ?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : No.

SONYA : I knew it. One more question. Tell me frankly, would you like your husband to be young ?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : What a little girl you are. Certainly

## THE WOOD DEMON

I should ! (*laughing*). Well, ask some more questions, do ask.

SONYA : Do you like the Wood Demon ?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Yes, very much.

SONYA (*laughing*) : I have a silly expression on my face . . . have I ? He's gone, and I still seem to hear his voice, his steps, and as I look at the dark window I seem to see his face there. . . . Let me tell you everything. . . . But I can't speak aloud, I'm ashamed. Come to my room, I'll tell you there. Do I seem silly to you ? Tell me. . . . He's a nice man ?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Very, very nice. . . .

SONYA : His forests, peat—they seem strange to me. . . . I can't make it all out.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : But forests are not the point ! My darling, you see, it is talent that matters ! You know what talent is ? Courage, a free spirit, soaring to the heights . . . he plants a little tree or digs up a hundredweight of peat—and already he visualises what's to happen in a thousand years, he already dreams of the happiness of mankind. Such men as he are valuable, and should be loved. God bless you. You both are pure, courageous, honest. He's rather untamed, but you are sensible, clear-headed. . . . You will complete one another splendidly . . . (*getting up*). And I, I am tiresome, I am an episodic character . . . In my music, in my husband's house, and in all your love makings—in everything I have only been an episodic character. Indeed, Sonya, if you come to think of it, I am, probably, very, very unhappy ! (*pacing the room in agitation*). There's no happiness for me in this world ! No ! . . . Why do you laugh ?

SONYA (*laughing and covering her face*) : I am so happy ! So very happy.

ELENA (*wringing her hands*) : Indeed, how unhappy I am !

SONYA : I am happy . . . happy.

ELENA : I want music. . . . I should like to play now. . . .

SONYA : Do play (*embracing her*). I can't sleep. . . . Do play.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : I will. Your father hasn't gone to bed. When he's not well, music irritates him. Go and ask him. If he does not object, I'll play . . . go and ask him.

SONYA : I shall be back in a moment (*going out*).

(*The night watchman knocks in the garden.*)

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : I haven't played for a long time. I shall play, and cry like a fool . . . (*going to the window*). Is it you knocking there, Yefim ?

THE WATCHMAN'S Voice : Ye-s !

ELENA ANDREYEVNA : Stop knocking. The master is not well.

THE WATCHMAN'S Voice : I'm going ! (*whistling*). Nigger !

Jack ! Nigger ! (*after a pause*).

SONYA (*returning*) : No !

(*To be concluded*).

# Poems

BY EDWIN MUIR.

*From "Chorus of the Newly Dead."*

## The Coward.

The cities hounded me ; I fled ;  
An angry cloud hung o'er my head ;  
It flew above me through the day  
To where great stones in deserts lay.

I climbed the sultry mountain track ;  
The hill reared up and struck me back.  
My feet sank in the soundless fen ;  
The forest was a dragon's den.

And, spawn of earth, in waning light  
Arose far off from gulfs of fright,  
Encircling all the plain, the crests  
Of small round hills like angry breasts.

And on that waste where slept the dust,  
Lo ! a little tree upthrust ;  
But stiff and dry, a dead man's arm,  
Evil, but impotent to harm.

The tame town mongrels seemed to know  
My secret fear. They watched me go  
With shameless and considering eyes,  
Turned to each other in surmise.

And still the cloud hung o'er my head !  
Now it has burst, and I am dead.  
And to mysterious nooks of clay  
That mighty dream has rolled away.

## The Harlot.

The mean great street in evening heat  
 Shot pistons to the sunset sky.  
 Up to my room the traffic's beat  
 Arose and fell : "A whore am I!"

Stale powder's dust on everything ;  
 Faint scent of flesh upon the walls :  
 I sat within a shambles' ring,  
 Where a perpetual victim falls.

As down the darkening street I fared  
 The pavement rose and struck at me.  
 Each doorway was a cannon bared,  
 Each block a naked battery.

I walked between. Naught could I hear  
 Save the loud echoing of my feet  
 On pavements neither far nor near.  
 Past Time stretched on the brazen street.

The blocks went blind, weak lamps were lit,  
 The dark bridge held me like a claw—  
 A pinioned captive to be hit  
 By all the naked eyes I saw,

Until, delivered, I turned back  
 With someone with a form and face ;  
 Our trivial heels, click-clack, click-clack,  
 Went with us to the offering place,

Where 'mid the powder and the scent,  
 As down a dark and dusty well,  
 Through all the toppling tenement,  
 Laughing I fell, and fell, and fell !

## The Mystic.

The tiny demon shapes that warn  
 In field and city, wake again :  
 The hillock, lightning clawed and torn,  
 The nettles in the stifling lane,

The mangled thicket where, half-shown,  
 Three tracks like twisting vipers meet,  
 The squat facade of tortured stone  
 Close ambushed in the sultry street.

None read their lineaments but I,  
 Who knew what grinding levers move  
 To change the orbit of an eye  
 Towards death, towards hate, or full towards love.

All shape was matter, working blind,  
 Appearance was stern flesh and blood.  
 If evil was there, then behind  
 Evil the universes stood,

As, ever unremovable,  
 Behind all beauty Beauty lay ;  
 The braided paths of Heaven and Hell  
 Writhed neath my feet, turned every way

But oh, that clear angelic host  
 Of mountains standing in the sky !  
 That dragon-wrought long silent coast  
 Where wheeling sun and stars went by !

Those proud heraldic animals  
 Like pictures in a primal dream,  
 Holding unconscious festivals  
 Which past our primal darkness gleam !

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That stationary country where  
Achilles drives and Hector runs,  
Making a movement in the air  
Forever, under all the suns !

And that ghostly eternity  
Cut by the bridge where journeys Christ,  
On endless arcs pacing the sea,  
Time turning with his solar tryst !

They sink behind me. Fate is here,  
Approaching, stumbling through the deep.  
And once again the primal fear  
Falls, and I wake from sleep to sleep.

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# On Foul and Blasphemous Tongues

BY ROBERT GRAVES.

OF recent years in England there has been a noticeable decline of swearing and foul language, and this, except at centres of industrial depression, shows every sign of continuing until a new shock to our national nervous system, a European war on a large scale or widespread revolutionary disturbances at home, revives the habit. While, therefore, obscene and blasphemous tongues are temporarily idle, it would be well to inquire intelligently into the nature and necessity of their employment: a ticklish theme and one seldom publicly treated except in comminations from orthodox pulpits. It is to be hoped that this essay will steer its difficult course without private offence to the reader as without public offence to the Censor.

The chief strength of the oath in Christian countries, and indeed everywhere, is this, that it is forbidden by authority, and the Mosaic injunction against taking the name of Jehovah in vain must mark the beginning of our research. This commandment seems to have had a double force, recording in the first place a taboo against the mention, except on solemn occasions, of the tribal god's holy name—for so among certain savage tribes it is still considered unlucky to use a man's real name, often only known to himself and the priest, and among preparatory schoolboys, no less savage, the Christian name is similarly protected from mention except by intimates—and in the second place a taboo against the misuse of even a decent periphrasis to the god's name: for the act of calling him to witness any feat or condition, or the summons to curse or destroy an enemy, must involve elaborate purifications or penalties. Any vain appeal to God to witness or punish a triviality is therefore forbidden as lessening not only the prestige of religion, but also the legal dues of the priestly

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commissioners of oaths. Now, however, that the economic interest has dwindled, and priesthood has been shorn of temporal powers, the vain oath is no longer punishable with stoning or the stake, it is merely regarded as a breach of the peace. "Goddam you, sir, for your interference" spoken to a railway company official is not liable to greater penalties than "To the pigs with dirty King William" spoken in Belfast. Though the railwayman is given credit for possible religious fanaticism, and though the goddam-er is formally reminded of the solemn nature of the oath when he kisses the Book in the witness-box, the Almighty is left to avenge the spiritual fault personally.

The taboo on vain mention of God or Gods is also extended to the divine mysteries, to the sacraments and sacred writings, and to the human representatives of Heaven where they are permitted direct communion with the Absolute. In Catholic countries, saints and prophets are, therefore, used for swearing in a low key, and it has meant a serious lessening of the dignity of the Almighty in England that Protestantism and Dissent have removed these valuable intermediaries from objurgation as from adoration. In Catholic countries, too, the Bible is not vulgarly broadcast: and an oath by the Great Chained Word of God is resonant and effective: while in England the prolific output of sixpennyworths and even penn'orths of the Holy Scriptures from secular presses has further weakened the vocabulary of the forceful blasphemer. The triumph of Protestantism is, perhaps, best shown by the decline into vapidity of "By George!" the proudest oath an Englishman could once swear: for the fact is we have lost all interest in our patron saint. It has been stated with detail and persistence that in the late summer of 1918 an Australian mounted unit sensationaly rediscovered the actual bones of St. George; they were brought to light by the explosion of a shell in the vault of a ruined church. The officer in command sent a telegram to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster inviting them to house the holy relics. After some delay the Dean and Chapter regretted the serious overcrowding of their columns: for, of course, though they could not very well mention it, St. George was a bloody German. So the saint was lost again by the disgusted Australians, this time beyond rescue. Or

so one version of the story has it. The other version, more attractive if less authenticated, suggests that the Dean relented later and permitted the relics to be smuggled into the Abbey under the thin disguise of *The Unknown Warrior*, thereby avoiding offence to anti-popish feeling.

Undistinguished as the oath by St. George has become, he has at any rate had the honour of outlasting all his peers. Where is there an Englishman who, mislaying his purse or pipe, will threaten it in the name of St. Anthony? or black-guarding a cobbler for making a bad repair to his boots will swear by the holy last of St. Crispin that, if that cobbler does not do the job again properly, he will have half-a-pound of his own blunt brads forced down his lying throat? And whom has England got to match the Pope as a swearing-stock? Once in a public-house a young Italian and a middle-aged Londoner were arguing politics. The Italian warmly quoted the Vatican and its works. "Oh, to hell with the Pope," rumbled the Englishman. "And to hell," belched out the furious Italian, upsetting the glasses with a blow of his fist, "and to hell with your Archbishop of Canterbury!" The Englishman swallowed the insult agreeably, but expostulated on the waste of good liquor.

Bound up with the taboo on the mention of God, of Heaven His throne, and Earth His footstool, and of all His other charges and minions, is the complementary taboo on the Devil, his ministers, and his prison-house. At one time the vain invocation of the Devil was an even more dangerous misdemeanour than the breach of the third Commandment. God, though He would not hold him guiltless who took His Name in vain, might forgive an occasional lapse; but the Devil, if ever called in professionally, would not fail to charge heavily for his visit. However, since the great Victorian day when an excited working-man came rushing out of the City church where Dean Farrar was preaching the gospel and shouted out to his friends at the public-house corner: "Good news! Old Farrar says there's no 'ell," the taboo has yearly weakened. "That dreadful other place," as Christina respectfully called it in the deathbed scene of Butler's *Way of All Flesh*, is now seldom insisted upon in the home pulpit. One regretfully hears that the threat of hell's quenchless flames and the

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satyro-morphic view of Satan, are now chiefly used for export purposes to Kenya and the Congo Basin, as a cement to the bonds of Empire.

There is no surer way of testing the current of popular religious opinion than by examining the breaches of the taboos in swearing. At the present day the First Person of the Trinity is not taken too seriously. "O God!" has become only a low-grade oath and has crept into the legitimate vocabulary of the drawing-room and stage. The Second Person, since the great evangelical campaigns of the last century overturned a despotism and established a spiritual republic, is far more firmly established. To swear by Jesus Christ is an oath with weight behind it. The Third Person is seldom appealed to, and makes a very serious oath, partly because of the Biblical warning that the sin against the Holy Ghost is the one unforgivable offence, and partly because the word *Ghost* suggests a sinister spiritual haunting. "God" to the crowd is a benevolent or laughable abstraction, Jesus Christ is a hero for whom it is possible to have a warm friendly feeling, but the Holy Ghost is a puzzle and to be superstitiously avoided.

From blasphemy and semi-blasphemy it is only a short step to secular irreverence. Many secular objects where they have become symbolic of deep-seated loyalties are held in the highest reverence by naval, military and sporting society. The Crown and the Union Jack are for the governing classes enthroned beside the altar and the communion-cup. To call the smallest King's ship a "boat," let alone a "wretched tub" or "lousy hencoop," is to invite broken ribs; to mistake a pack of hounds in full cry for "a whole lot of howling dogs" is social suicide. The ingenious General G——r, so remarkable an artist in swearing that he must one day earn a paragraph in the revised D.N.B., used this form of prophanity with the happiest effect. Once, when inspecting the famous "Z." Battery of the Royal Horse Artillery, he was dissatisfied with its response to his order "Dismount." He bellowed out:—"Now *climb back again*, you pack of consumptive little Maltese monkeys!" "Z." Battery complained to headquarters of this affront, and General G——r was in due course asked for his explanation and apology. He gave it briefly as follows:—

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“SIR,

“I have the honour to report that, on the occasion to which I am referred, my order to dismount was obeyed in so slovenly a fashion that for the moment I was deceived. I concluded that I was actually assisting at a performance by a troop of little Maltese monkeys, amusing enough but crippled by disease. I tender my apologies to all ranks of “Z.” Battery for my mistake.

“I have the honour to be, Sir,

“Your obedient servant,

Besides these religious and semi-religious taboos there is a whole series forbidding the mention of any realistic danger or misfortune that may be lurking round the corner. So it is a greater personal offence to tell a taxi-man “May your gears seize up and your tyres burst, and may you get pitched through your windscreen and break both legs against a lamp-post” than merely to ejaculate “Blast your bleeding neck!” or “Plague take you!” Instances of necks bleeding and divinely blasted are rarely met in General Hospitals, and England has been free from plague these two hundred years. To curse effectively one must invoke a reality or at the least a possibility. Any swearing that fails to wound the susceptibility of the person sworn at or witness to the oath is mere play. Few people enjoy being sworn at, but there are no forms of humour more boring than guaranteed non-alcoholic substitutes for the true wine of swearing: “Great Jumping Beans!” “Ye little fishes!” “Snakes and ladders!” and “Mind your step, you irregular old Pentagon.” If Sinclair Lewis has done nothing else in *Martin Arrowsmith*, he has at least nailed up as a loathed type Cliff Clawson, the medical student, who indulged perpetually in this form of heartiness.

Among the governed classes one of the unforgivable words of abuse is “bastard.” Bastardy is always a possibility, and savagely tormented whenever it appears: so that “You bastard!” must be regarded as a definite allegation. Whereas in the governing classes there is far greater tolerance towards bastards, who often have noble and even royal blood in their veins, and who, under the courtesy title “natural sons and daughters,” have contributed largely to our ancestral splendours. On the other hand, the other common word in “B.”

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which originally meant a Bulgarian heretic, but later implied "one addicted to unnatural vice," is not a serious insult among the governed, who are free from the homo-sexual habit. Dr. Johnson rightly defined the word as "a term of endearment among sailors." Whereas in the governing classes the case is reversed. When some thirty years ago the word was written nakedly up on a club notice-board as a charge against one of its members, there followed a terrific social explosion, from which the dust has even now not yet settled. Had the accusation been "Mr. Wilde is a bastard," shoulders would merely have been shrugged at the noble lord's quixotic ill-temper. As it was . . .

And this brings us to the sex-taboo, from the violation of which abusive swearing draws its chief strength ; mention even of the privy parts of the body is protected by a convention which has lost little of its rigidity since mid-Victorian times. The soldier, shot through the buttocks at Loos, who was asked by a visitor where he had been wounded, could only reply "I'm sorry, ma'am, I don't know : I never learned Latin." Public reference to a man's navel, thighs or arm-pits, even, is a serious affront : from which the size of the "breeches of fig-leaves" tailored in Eden may be deduced. It is difficult to determine how far this taboo is governed by the sense of reverence, and how far the feeling is one of disgust and puritanic self-hate. But in any case the double function of the tabooed organs, the progenitive and excretory principles, has confused the grammatic mind of civilisation.

The words "whore" and "harlot" are among the angriest properties of swearing in any class : in the governed classes they are taken realistically, the conditions of life being often so difficult under industrialism that the temptation for a woman to embark on this adventurous but unhappy career is a serious one. In the governing classes the accusation is one of æsthetic coarseness : to have a *liaison* is excusable, and sometimes, if the lover chosen is sufficiently distinguished, even admirable : but the amateur status must be strictly maintained in love as in sport. (It may be noticed in passing that the word "pro." is a deadly insult among Public School soccer players : and the greatest compliment in village or waste-ground football.) In no class, it is to be regretted, does the accusation against a

man that he goes with harlots rank as a serious insult, though "pimp," "ponce" and "procurer" are ugly enough. For some reason or other the hatred of cuckoldry has abated : the very word is forgotten in popular talk ; I would welcome an explanation of this. But the prevalence of the homo-sexual fashion, bringing back that unfortunate figure the boy-harlot of Imperial Roman times, has added to the unforgivable list the synonyms "Nancy-boy" and "poof." The chastity of sister or daughter has become a far more serious consideration than the faithfulness of a wife. When once the master of a Thames tug, remonstrated with for fouling a pleasure boat and breaking an oar, leant over the rails and replied hoarsely : "Oh, I did, did I, Charley ? And talking of oars, 'ow's your sister ? ", he only did so in his detestation of the leisured classes and in confidence of a clean get-away.

Another serious abusive accusation in most classes is, fortunately enough, of venereal infection. I write "fortunately" because, though the stigma may tend in some cases to concealment of the disease, there have been times when infection has been considered a mark of manliness, a fashionable martyrdom. It was so considered on its first introduction into England, for Henry VIII. was one of the first sufferers from the Neapolitan sickness ; and it has been so considered in Central European military circles in quite recent times. I even met this view among young ex-Sandhurst officers during the War. But the lasting and painful results of venereal disease to family life are now generally realised, so "pox-ridden" and "clap-stricken" are daily gaining in offensiveness as epithets.

It is only a minor taboo that prevents reference to human excrement, but major swearing is strengthened by lavatory metaphors of worthlessness or noisome disgust. Again, it is only a minor taboo that forbids mention of lice, fleas and bugs. But the imputation of lousiness (except in the trenches, where it was a joke) carries serious implications with it : and the metaphorical "You louse !" is ripe with hatred.

Now the odd combinations that a witty and persistent mind could contrive from the breach of several of these taboos at once are far more numerous than appears at first sight. The lewd fellow who can go on swearing, without repetition, for

## ON FOUL AND BLASPHEMOUS TONGUES

an hour or more should not deserve the high popular esteem that he wins by the feat. Consider for a moment. It takes nine hours or more to exhaust the combinations of a full peal of church bells : then, while there are still so many taboos major or minor that a daring mouth can find to outrage, with such an ancient wealth of technical and associative matter to be excavated within each of these taboos, and so constant an enrichment of this ancient wealth by new pathological research, by religious sectarianism and by the advance of our imperial frontiers, and while the effect of a discord played between the taboos which protect sacred objects and those which repress disgust or terror can be so shattering—well, then, the recourse that most celebrated swearers take to foreign tongues or dialects must be considered a confession of imaginative failure.

Add to this positive foulmoutheredness the art of negative swearing, and the thermo-dynamic entropy of the ingenious swearing-bout becomes even more intense. The sequel to General G——r's inspection of "Z." Battery is to the point here. He had been privately given to understand that another instance of abusive or foul language on parade would cause him to lose his command. Then the day came when he was not inspecting but being inspected, by the Commander-in-Chief of the Forces. His brigade had assembled on the field of parade half-an-hour before the C.-in-C. was expected, and General G——r had posted a trumpeter at the gate where the beflagged motor was expected to pull up. The lad had been ordered to sound the call for "Steady!" as soon as he saw the car approaching ; but even if it did not arrive sooner, the call was in any case to be given three minutes before the hour. He was to watch the church clock. Time passed, no car came, the call did not sound. Then the hour chimed. Infuriated by this, the general set spurs to his charger and thundered down to the gate. Passion choked him, his face grew crimson. He reined up by the terrified trumpeter, and, pointing down at him with his finger, spoke in ogreish tones :

" Oh, you naughty, naughty, naughty little trumpeter." And at that moment, under cover of a hedge, for they had left their Rolls-Royce on the high road, up came the Commander-in-Chief and his staff, on foot.

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Of the necessity for swearing there is more than one opinion : large numbers both of the educated and the uneducated stand for the rigour of the taboo and for self-control : for them yea must always be yea, and nay, nay. Yet in practice they permit a few sterilised ejaculations, such as " You silly beggar," which is the drawing-room synonym for the double b. of the street corner ; "bother," "blow," and "dash" do service for "damn," "curse" and "blast" which are just beyond the old-fashioned limit.

Another section of the community swears luxuriously, from anti-institutional conviction : but a middle course is, as usual, the most popular one ; bad language is permitted only under extreme provocation, and even then must stop short of complicated invention.

There is no doubt that swearing has a definite physiological function : for after childhood relief in tears and wailing is rightly discouraged, and groaning is also considered a signal of extreme weakness. Silence under suffering is usually impossible. The nervous system demands some expression that does not reflect towards cowardice and feebleness, and, as a nervous stimulant in a crisis, swearing is unequalled. It is a Saturnalian defiance of Destiny. Where rhetorical appeals to Fatherland, Duty, Honour, Self-respect and similar idealistic abstractions fail, the well-chosen oath will often save the situation.

Frequent swearing is often, no doubt, the accompaniment of debauch, cruelty and presumption, but, on the other hand, it is as often merely what the psychologists call the " sublimation in fantasia of a practical anti-social impulse " ; and what others call " poor man's poetry." But if the latter simile be permitted, it would seem that original poets are as rare in non-literary as they are in literary society. Occasionally in low life one hears a picturesque ancestral oath or an imaginative modern one coined by some true blasphemer and carefully stored by an admirer for his own use—"as in wild earth a Grecian vase." But for the most part the dreary repetition of the two sexual mainstays of barrack-room swearing is the despair of the artist.

A useful addition might be made to Messrs. Kegan Paul's series of prophetic books, of which Mr. Haldane's *Icarus* is

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the most famous. It would be called "*Lars Porsena*; or the Future of Swearing." *Lars Porsena*, if we may trust Lord Macaulay, was more fortunate than ourselves: he had no less than nine gods to swear by, and every one of them in Tarquin times was taken absolutely seriously. Let us briefly outline the argument along the course suggested by this essay:—

The imaginative decline of popular swearing under industrial standardisation and since the popular Education Acts of fifty years ago: the possibility that swearing will recover its lost prestige as a fine art; following the failure of the Saints and Prophets, and the breakdown of orthodox Heaven and Hell as supreme swearing-stocks, the rich compensation offered by newer semi-religious institutions, such as the "League of Nations" and "International Socialism," and by superstitious objects such as pipes, primroses and black-shirts and blood-stained banners; the chances of the eventual disappearance of the sex taboo and of the slur on bastardy, but in the near future intentional use of Freudian symbols as objurgatory material; the effect on swearing of the gradual spread of spiritistic belief, of new popular diseases such as botulism and sleepy sickness, of new forms of chemical warfare, and of the sanction which the Anglican Church is openly giving to contraception, thereby legitimising the dissociation of the erotic and progenitive principles. Research would be suggested on the alliterative emphasis and rhythm of swearing, on the maximum nervous reaction that can be got from a normal subject by combinations and permutations of the oath, the results to be recorded on a highly sensitive kymograph. Finally, this valuable work might treat of the prospects of Pure Swearing; by which is not meant sterilised swearing or "Cliff Clawsonism," but *Swearing without a practical element, without definite reference to psychological moods, Swearing of universal application and eternal beauty*, following the recent sentimental cult for Pure Poetry.

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## Andron, the Good-for-Nothing—(ii).

By ALEXANDER NIEVIEROV.

Vancha's wife is a meek woman. This is the sixth year of their marriage—and she has never contradicted him. Sometimes, if he is angry, Vancha shouts at her—she does not complain. Sometimes, if he is irritated, he strikes her—she never says a word. A good wife!

Just as one wants her to be!

They lived and lived together, and it was nobody's business. Suddenly something happened.

Vancha came home very much upset. Lukeriya wasn't in. He walked out into the courtyard—she wasn't there. He walked into the street—she wasn't there. Have the dogs eaten her? He got so angry—he puckered his face. He sat down on the bed—the thick cloth blanket smelt of woman. But the woman wasn't there. He thrust his nose into the purple pillow-case—it also smelt of woman. But the woman wasn't there.

“She's gone, the devil!”

The night comes in through the windows, and Lukeriya isn't there. The hens went to sleep on their perch—she wasn't there. Vancha got still more angry. He fidgeted on the thick home-made blanket with his belly downwards, turning over and over.

“She's gone, the devil!”

Gone and gone. Whose business is it? And Vancha ought not to mind it, but he was so upset. He felt that he must beat his horse in the courtyard. He jumped off the bed and rushed across the room. He ran out into the entrance-hall—Lukeriya walked in from the street.

“Where has the devil been leading you?”

No, it was not the same woman! Not the same woman that was married to him for five years. Even the voice was not hers, not the voice of the woman who has never contradicted him.

“You, Ivan, do not shout at me!”

## ANDRON

The floor reeled under Vancha's feet, all the cottage turned inside out. He lifted up his hand to strike her, but Lukeriya caught him by the arm.

" You, Ivan, do not beat me any more ! "

It seemed strange to the man.

" Why shouldn't I beat you ? "

" I got tired of your blows. This is the sixth year I have been married to you and I've never heard a single nice word from you ! "

Vancha is put out of countenance.

The nose is Lukeriya's nose, the freckles are her freckles but Lukeriya herself is gone. It is not Lukeriya who stands before him. A cat ! And her eyes glow like the eyes of a cat.

" She has turned proud, the devil of a woman ! But it's all the same, I'll thrash her in the night if she is obstinate. Get the supper ready ! "

They had some supper.

" Make the bed comfortable ! "

She made it comfortable.

" Go to bed ! "

She lay herself down, turning her back to him—he pulled her by the shoulder.

" Turn your face to me ! "

She turned herself as he wanted, but it was not enough.

" Stop, put your leg . . . "

Lukeriya turned her back towards him again.

" Do you hear, eh ? "

" I don't want it."

Vancha was put out of countenance. He felt excited under the thick cloth blanket, his nostrils were quivering. His little beard—consisting of four hairs—bristled upwards.

" Are you sick, eh ? "

" You, Ivan, don't know the proper time ! "

No, it was not the same woman ! Not the same woman that had been married to him for five years !

" Ah, you, the devil's head ! "

Here ! he struck her on the side with his fist. He knew very well that it was not painful. But Lukeriya hissed at him like a cat.

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" You, Ivan, would do better not to beat me ! "  
That's a trick !

They sit on the bed and think. The harmonica plays, the girls sing. Nothing has moved from its place. The light burns in Proskurov's cottage. Proskurov himself sits at the table, his wife in a petticoat bustles about. Of course, they are having their supper. Then they'll go to bed. Everything as it should be in a peasant's family. Only Vancha and Lukeriya sit on the bed and think. He asks her as if he were joking :

" Where have you been ? "

And she answers him also as if she were joking :

" I went to see my lover."

" And if I screw your head off for it ? "

" Do ! "

Thus it began. Vancha decided to screw her head off, Lukeriya sprang off the bed.

" If you beat me I'll go away from you ! "

" Where will you go ? "

" I'll live at my mother's."

That's right ! A married woman will live at her mother's !

" Who has put this into your head ? "

And Lukeriya answered like a girl who has never known a husband :

" I don't like you, Ivan, for this ! You have no delicacy with us women."

So they went to sleep that night, turning their backs to each other.

\* \* \*

Something still worse happened at Filimonov's cottage. The youngest daughter-in-law tucked up her skirt and walked away like a cow leaving the herd. Her brothers, the red soldiers, came and dragged away her trunk, like a dead body. The husband Filimonov looked at it—but his hands were tied by an invisible force.

A nice trick !

Yesterday he had a wife, to-day he has no wife. Yesterday she was mending Filimonov's trousers, to-day there is nobody to mend them.

What a devil's doing !

## ANDRON

Filimonov walks about the cottage and grinds his teeth.

A sparrow has its own wife, a black-beetle has its own wife. What kind of a life can Filimonov have without a woman? He filled his heart with anger and went to the Executive Committee (Ispolkom). He suddenly remembered that Andron had been unanimously elected the president of the Ispolkom. Filimonov also lifted his hand when they were electing him: a clever fellow was Andron—he had been through twelve towns!

“What is your business, comrade Filimonov?” asked Andron.

“An unpleasant thing happened between my wife and myself, comrade Andron Mikhailytch.”

“Tell me how it happened.”

Filimonov told him how it all happened. Andron opened in front of him the Code of Soviet Law:

“One must look upon a woman in a different way and not force her to live with one. One should not beat her, too. In general, the position of a woman is not the same now as it was before. She cannot be forced to anything.”

“And if I apply to the court of law?”

“Nothing will come of it. We shall be judges, and we have the Code of Law.”

Filimonov looked at the Code—it was a large book; one could not step over it. He felt ever so offended—he would like to smash the Code to pieces on the woman’s head—but it was impossible: his hands were tied by an invisible force.

He walks along the street; he has long legs. It is not a step that he takes—it is a verst. He walked past his cottage, his vegetable-garden; his eyes do not see anything. Nobody knows where he walks. He walked out of the village and sat down.

A sparrow pecks his wife. A cock pecks his wife. Why is Filimonov forbidden to do the same thing? The devil’s doing! The man is created in order to be the master. Can one live any other way? If you do not strike a horse will it drive you? If you do not strike a woman, will she obey?

He jumped up, clenching his fists, and thought:

“I’ll kill them! Let them put me into prison afterwards!”

\* \* \*

Granny Matrena has a presentiment. She feels that something is coming near—a thunderstorm or a misfortune. All day long she has a pain at the pit of her stomach. She wanted to pray, but the prayer did not come to her mind. All sorts of unsanctified words came to her mind, but the prayer did not come. She remembered about the cabbage—it was time to mince it. She remembered about the calf—of course, he wanted some drink. The unsanctified words came back to her mind again and again. She looked at the Saint Nikolai in the front corner, but he did not look like himself. Either something happened to granny's eyes, or to the Saint himself. Indeed, he did not look like himself!

She would like to go to the church and pray when the choir was singing—but the priest was not there. He officiated for twelve years when Andron was running about as a small boy. He officiated for three years more when Andron was fighting with the bourgeoisie. Andron came back from the war and declared :

“ We don't want a pope ! ”

Granny Matrena wept and repeated to him :

“ We want the priest ! ”

But Andron insisted :

“ We don't want him ! ”

Sienin and Markonin, Potughin and Mikhaila tried to persuade him, saying :

“ We want him ! ”

Andron was as obstinate as before :

“ No, we don't ! ”

They led the priest out of his large house—how many tears were shed ! All the old women were weeping, all the old men were shaking their heads.

“ No good will come of it ! ”

Thus, surrounded with weeping, the priest got into the church carriage. He harnessed his grey mare, made his wife and children sit down in the cart, hung the kettle at the back of the cart, like a gipsy !

“ The orthodox Christians ! If you do not want me, I must go away from here. You see yourselves what my family position is—I must look for another job.”

## ANDRON

The church stands locked, the bells do not ring. The calves roll on the porch, the pigeons coo on the belfry all day long. There are no chimes, so they coo. The communal padlock hangs on the church doors—there is nobody to take it off. Granny Matrena takes it off in thought, and secretly enters the inviolable silence. She falls upon her knees because of the feeling of a great sin which oppresses her soul, and bitterly complains to God :

“ Forgive, O Lord, forgive us, ungodly people ! We have sinned before you, we have broken your Law. Do not send us to the eternal torture of burning in the flame ; bestow your Heavenly Kingdom upon us, O Lord ! ”

But the Saints do not look at her. Their faces are blackened, their eye-brows are drawn together. There is no smoke of incense around them. Not a single candle stands before the forsaken ones. This is the third month that they are locked in, like brigands !

“ Lord, forgive my good-for-nothing son Andron ! His hands have hung the padlock, his words have perverted the young ones. And the old people are like horses tied to a stake : they walk eight sashens in one direction and eight sashens in another direction. They can walk only eight sashens in every direction and no more.”

When Granny Matrena was bearing Andron in her womb it was a sorrow. When she was carrying him in her arms—it was another sorrow. Now he walks by himself—again a sorrow for the mother ! It grows like unmown grass, it stretches like an untrodden path. In what river can she drown it ? She wept for two days—it did not get drowned. She wept for a week—it did not get drowned. It grows from every tear. Granny Matrena looks at the sun and sees a sorrow. She looks at the people and sees a sorrow. All life is an unmeasured sorrow.

“ O Lord, forgive my good-for-nothing son Andron ! ”

\* \* \*

Andron sits at the Ispolkom and issues order after order.

“ In the former house of the priest, to arrange a stage immediately for various performances. To mobilise the

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carpenter Kuzma Vakhromeev and the joiner Tikhon Bieliakov without fail. To take from Prokhor Cheremushkin eight boards for communal use."

Cheremushkin swears with his small tongue—his big one is silent. Tikhon and Kuzma also swear with their small tongues—their big ones are silent.

"Here is a governor for you!"

If one complains to the seniors—one will be looked upon as a counter-revolutionary.

The Secretary of the Ispolkom writes:

"To all the collective of the village Rogatchevo.

"Immediately to plough the land belonging to the red soldiers' wives, for winter sowing."

All the volost swear with their small tongues.

"Here is a governor for you!"

One cannot do anything. Tikhon and Kuzma hew the stage in the priest's house, make a great noise with their axes. The priest's old house groans. The boards creak, the partition-walls break. Prokhor brings the eight boards for communal use, whipping his horse across its hind legs. His eyes glow under his cap, the sand crisps between his teeth.

One cannot do anything!

The peasants plough the land for the winter crops, for the red soldiers' wives, and smack their lips from astonishment:

"Here is management for you!"

The management is bad, however they plough the land. Nobody wants to be looked upon as a counter-revolutionary.

\* \* \*

The earth started to turn in the wrong direction, the sun arose from the wrong side. Aniutka Panfilova came home with a part and began to walk to and fro about the cottage.

"Akh, leave me quiet, Volodia! I cannot . . . in such a position."

The father watched the girl's whims and got sulky.

"Stop it!"

And she smiled like a little fool.

"Why do you swear, dad?"

"I am sick of looking at you!"

## ANDRON

"This is my role : I have to act a lady in the book."

The mother sighed.

"You run about with the communists a little longer ! They'll make you a role ! "

The father bumped his bast-shoe against the floor from anger.

"I'll screw your head off if you come to me pregnant ! "

\* \* \*

One cannot do anything.

Vancha saw Lukeriya moving her lips.

"What are you mumbling ? "

"I want to learn my role by heart."

"Akh, you, damned thing ! "

For ten years life stood on the same spot. For twenty years it stood on the same spot. They thought, it will stay like this for another fifty years, but it changed. Where did it go—nobody could say. And when did it change—nobody could say. This year or last year. The stoves are being heated, the dogs bark—just as it was before. But if one shuts one eye and looks with the other—there is something, somewhere, only one cannot feel it at once with one's hands.

Andron thinks, sitting at the Ispolkom :

"The peasants will not be mastered voluntarily. I will act as I want myself. Write ! "

The secretary has a large inkstand. In the old régime days one would not use all the ink in a year, now they add some more every day.

\* \* \*

Andron has a company—one could not invent anything better. Grishka Kopchik with a wooden leg—a beggar. Yashka Mazla—a beggar. Fedka Badyla—a beggar. But it does not matter. That's why they are called communists—because they have nothing. But how Mishka Potughin got to know these people ? He registered himself as a member of the Young People's Union. And they have evening parties at the Union every day. The young men go there and the young girls go there. It would be good if only the girls went—but the married women also call there in secret.

Vancha goes home at ten o'clock—it is night. People

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sleep here, people sleep there. Well, just as it is natural in their peasant way. They sleep. Only in the priest's house, on the boards, planed by Kuzma and taken from Cheremushkin for communal use, the girls and the young men, belonging to the Young People's Union, skip about. Vancha looks in and sees Lukeriya there, who bursts with laughter.

“Akh, the evil spirit !”

Vancha got ever so angry—he even spat.

“You, Lukeriya, see you do not make me commit a sin ! I am a quiet man, you know yourself. But if you make me lose my patience—the worse for you !”

And she smiled in the darkness.

“Well, it is enough to swear, Ivan ! I was looking for the cow, lo ! there was a light in the windows.”

“Look here—a cow ! If you bring me a red-haired calf—I tell you beforehand.”

But she smiled in the darkness.

“Ivan, I'll go and play once more ?”

Vancha placed himself across the road—his heart welled up to his mouth. What could he do with the woman ? If he struck her in the street, she would scream.

And she pressed herself to his side.

“Don't be angry, Ivan, I want to live on good terms with you. If you don't want me to, I will not do it !”

There's a right saying about a woman : a cat she is ! She scratches with one paw and soothes with the other. In which ear does she say the truth ? One should beat her for this !

\*     \*     \*

Prokhorova forgot her husband's name. Her young blood got excited—one couldn't stop her. She learned different foreign words from Andron : culture, equal rights, and so on. It would be good if only the young girls listened to them—but the married women listened too. It would be good if only the young ones—but the old people also climb over the fence. A good wife Erofey had ! Real gold ! Sometimes Erofey fidgeted on the stove with his belly downwards, and she said to him in a kind voice :

“Get up, man, it is time to have your dinner !”

She spread the cloth on the table and said again as kindly as before :

“Get up, man, the cabbage soup will get cold ! ”

Erofey enjoyed a very quiet life. He thought it will remain like this till his very death. Once in the evening he was coming home. The smoke was creeping out of the chimney. Erofey boasted to himself :

“One can live with my wife ! May God give everybody such a woman ! ”

He approached the gates and saw Anna sticking out of the window. The young woman Zakharova stood at the window. Well, what did it matter ? Let her stick out if she wants. Evidently there was some business ; she would not stick out without some business. He entered the cottage : true, the stove was lighted and the pot stood not far from the fire. The wood was burning in the stove. Something has happened, it could not be otherwise.

“Anna, stop talking, I want to have my supper ! ”

“Wait, man, I am busy ! ”

Erofey said again in a minute’s time :

“The wood has nearly burned. Do you hear, eh ? ”

Anna turned her head towards him a little.

“Ohh, man, I have no water. Come, run fast ! ”

Of course, something has happened. The woman never spoke to him like that before. He brought some water, Anna clasped her hands :

“Ohh, man, the cottage was not swept to-day ! Take a broom and give a sweep, whilst I am peeling potatoes.”

“What were you doing till now ? ”

“Well, I forgot all about it talking to Pashurka Zakharova. The women arranged a meeting about the Women’s Department and asked me to come, too. Sweep, Erofey, sweep ! ”

The real trouble is not this. One may sweep the floor if one’s wite gets sick or is going to be delivered. The real trouble is this : is it good for a man to soil himself with a broom whilst his wife is in a hurry to run to the Women’s Department ?

Erofey’s sight became confused. He saw Anna as through a mist, he saw all the cottage as through a mist. He sat down on the bench and felt something hot under the seat.

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He sat down elsewhere and felt even hotter. He contained himself so that nothing unnecessary should happen, and said :

“ Do you want to laugh at me ? ”

“ Why should I laugh ? ”

“ Stop it, before I get angry ! ”

Here Anna became unlike herself. She bent her head sideways, put her arms a-kimbo.

“ Well, my dear Erofey, I have not the strength of two people ! One must coax you in the night, one must look after you in the daytime ! What sins have I committed that I should never have any rest ? ”

Erofey listened to her and his left leg was trembling all over. His left leg was trembling as if he had a fever.

Here is the Women’s Department for you ! One screw flew off—it would be impossible to stop it now.

*Translated by LYDIA TIBURTOVICH.*

*(To be Concluded.)*

# Morality and the Novel.

BY D. H. LAWRENCE.

THE business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment.

As mankind is always struggling in the toils of old relationships, art is always ahead of the "times," which themselves are always far in the rear of the living moment.

When Van Gogh paints sunflowers, he reveals, or achieves, the vivid relation between himself, as man, and the sunflower, as sunflower, at that quick moment of time. His painting does not represent the sunflower itself. We shall never know what the sunflower itself is. And the camera will *visualise* the sunflower far more perfectly than Van Gogh can.

The vision on the canvas is a third thing, utterly intangible and inexplicable, the offspring of the sunflower itself and Van Gogh himself. The vision on the canvas is forever incommensurable with the canvas, or the paint, or Van Gogh as a human organism, or the sunflower as a botanical organism. You cannot weigh nor measure, nor even describe the vision on the canvas. It exists, to tell the truth, only in the much-debated fourth dimension. In dimensional space it has no existence.

It is a revelation of the perfected relation, at a certain moment, between a man and a sunflower. It is neither man-in-the-mirror nor flower-in-the-mirror, neither is it above or below or across anything. It is in between everything, in the fourth dimension.

And this perfected relation between man and his circumambient universe is life itself, for mankind. It has the fourth-dimensional quality of eternity and perfection. Yet it is momentaneous.

Man and the Sunflower both pass away from the moment, in the process of forming a new relationship. The relation between all things changes from day to day, in a subtle stealth of change. Hence art, which reveals or attains to another perfect relationship, will be forever new.

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At the same time, that which exists in the non-dimensional space of pure relationship is deathless, lifeless and eternal. That is, it gives us the *feeling* of being beyond life or death. We say an Assyrian lion or an Egyptian hawk's head "lives." What we really mean is that it is beyond life, and, therefore, beyond death. It gives us that feeling. And there is something inside us which must also be beyond life and beyond death, since that "feeling" which we get from an Assyrian lion or an Egyptian hawk's head is so infinitely precious to us. As the evening star, that spark of pure relation between night and day, has been precious to man since time began.

If we think about it, we find that our life *consists in* this achieving of a pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe about us. This is how I "save my soul" by accomplishing a pure relationship between me and another person, me and other people, me and a nation, me and a race of men, me and the animals, me and the trees or flowers, me and the earth, me and the skies and sun and stars, me and the moon ; an infinity of pure relations, big and little, like the stars of the sky : that makes our eternity, for each one of us. Me and the timber I am sawing, the lines of force I follow, me and the dough I knead for bread, me and the very motion with which I write, me and the bit of gold I have got. This, if we knew it, is our life and our eternity : the subtle, perfected relation between me and my whole circumambient universe.

And morality is that delicate, forever trembling and changing *balance* between me and my circumambient universe, which precedes and accompanies a true relatedness.

Now here we see the beauty and the great value of the novel. Philosophy, religion, science, they are all of them busy nailing things down, to get a stable equilibrium. Religion, with its nailed-down One God, Who says *Thou shalt, Thou shan't*, and hammers home every time ; philosophy, with its fixed ideas ; science, with its "laws" ; they, all of them, all the time, want to nail us on to some tree or other.

But the novel, no ! The novel is the highest complex of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered. Everything is true in its own time, place, circumstance, and untrue outside of its own place, time, circumstance. If you try to

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nail anything down in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail.

Morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the balance. When the novelist puts his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is immorality.

The modern novel tends to become more and more immoral, as the novelist tends to press his thumb heavier and heavier in the pan: either on the side of love, pure love, or on the side of licentious "freedom."

The novel is not, as a rule, immoral because the novelist has any dominant *idea or purpose*. The immorality lies in the novelist's helpless, unconscious predilection. Love is a great emotion. But if you set out to write a novel, and you yourself are in the throes of the great predilection for love, love as the supreme, the only emotion worth living for, then you will write an immoral novel.

But *no* emotion is supreme, or exclusively worth living for. *All* emotions go to the achieving of a living relationship between a human being and the other human being or creature or thing he becomes purely related to. All emotions, including love and hate, and rage and tenderness, go to the adjusting of the oscillating, inestablished balance between two people who amount to anything. If the novelist puts his thumb in the pan, for love, tenderness, sweetness, peace, then he commits an immoral act: he *prevents* the possibility of a pure relationship, a pure relatedness, the only thing that matters: and he makes inevitable the horrible reaction, when he lets his thumb go, towards hate and brutality, cruelty and destruction.

Life is so made that opposites sway about a trembling centre of balance. The sins of the fathers are visited on the children. If the fathers drag down the balance on the side of love, peace and production, then in the third or fourth generation the balance will swing back violently to hate, rage and destruction. We must balance as we go.

And of all the art forms, the novel most of all demands the trembling and oscillating of the balance. The "sweet" novel is more falsified, and therefore more immoral than the blood and thunder novel.

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The same with the smart and smudgily cynical novel, which says it doesn't matter what you do, because one thing is as good as another, anyhow, and prostitution is just as much "life" as anything else.

This misses the point entirely. A thing isn't life just because somebody does it. This the artist ought to know perfectly well. The ordinary bank clerk buying himself a new straw hat isn't "life" at all: it is just existence, quite all right, like everyday dinners; but not "life."

By life, we mean something that gleams, that has the fourth-dimensional quality. If the bank clerk feels really piquant about his hat, if he establishes a lively relation with it, and goes out of the shop with the new straw on his head, a changed man, be-aureoled, then that is life.

The same with the prostitute. If a man establishes a living relation to her, if only for one moment, then it is life. But if he *doesn't*: if it is just money and function, then it is no life, but sordidness, and a betrayal of living.

If a novel reveals true and vivid relationships, it is a moral work, no matter what the relationships may consist in. If the novelist *honours* the relationship in itself, it will be a great novel.

But there are so many relationships which are not real. When the man in *Crime and Punishment* murders the old woman for sixpence, although it is *actual* enough, it is never quite real. The balance between the murderer and the old woman is gone entirely, it is only a mess. It is actuality, but it is not "life" in the living sense.

The popular novel, on the other hand, dishes up a rechauffé of old relationships: *If Winter Comes*. And old relationships dished up are likewise immoral. Even a magnificent painter like Raphael does nothing more than dress up in gorgeous new dresses relationships which have already been experienced. And this gives a gluttonous kind of pleasure to the mass: a voluptuousness, a wallowing. For centuries men say of their voluptuously ideal woman: "She is a Raphael Madonna." And women are only just learning to take it as an insult.

A new relation, a new relatedness, hurts somewhat in the attaining: and will always hurt. So life will always hurt. Because real voluptuousness lies in reacting old relationships,

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and, at the best, getting an alcoholic sort of pleasure out of it, slightly depraving.

Each time we strive to a new relation with anyone or anything it is bound to hurt somewhat. Because it means the struggle with and the displacing of old connections, and this is never pleasant. And, moreover, between living things, at least, an adjustment means also a fight, for each party, inevitably, must "seek its own" in the other, and be denied. When in the two parties each of them seeks his own, her own, absolutely, then it is a fight to the death. And this is true of the thing called "passion." On the other hand, when, of the two parties, one yields utterly to the other, this is called sacrifice, and it also means death. So the Constant Nymph died of her eighteen-months of constancy.

It isn't the nature of nymphs to be constant. She should have been constant in her nymph-hood. And it is unmanly to accept sacrifices. He should have abided by his own manhood.

There is, however, the third thing, which is neither sacrifice nor fight to the death: when each seeks only the true relatedness to the other. Each must be true to himself, herself, his own manhood, her own womanhood, and let the relationship work out of itself. This means courage above all things; and then discipline. Courage to accept the life-thrust from within oneself, and from the other person. Discipline, not to exceed oneself any more than one can help. Courage, when one has exceeded oneself, to accept the fact and not whine about it.

Obviously, to read a really new novel will *always* hurt, to some extent. There will always be resistance. The same with new pictures, new music. You may judge of their reality by the fact that they do arouse a certain resistance, and compel, at length, a certain acquiescence.

The great relationship, for humanity, will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child, will always be subsidiary.

And the relation between man and woman will change forever, and will forever be the new central clue to human life. It is the *relation itself* which is the quick and the central

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clue to life, not the man, nor the woman, nor the children that result from the relationship as a contingency.

It is no use thinking you can put a stamp on the relation between man and woman, to keep it in the *status quo*. You can't. You might as well try to put a stamp on the rainbow or the rain.

As for the bond of love, better put it off when it galls. It is an absurdity, to say that men and women *must love*. Men and women will be forever subtly and changingly related to one another, no need to yoke them with any "bond" at all. The only morality is to have man true to his manhood, woman to her womanhood, and let the relationship form of itself, in all honour. For it is, to each, *life itself*.

If we are going to be moral, let us refrain from driving pegs through anything, either through each other or through the third thing, the relationship, which is forever the ghost of both of us. Every sacrificial crucifixion needs five pegs, four short ones and a long one, each one an abomination. But when you try to nail down the relationship itself, and write over it *Love* instead of *This is the King of the Jews*, then you can go on putting in nails forever. Even Jesus called it the Holy Ghost, to show you that you can't lay salt on its tail.

The novel is a perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationships. The novel can help us to live as nothing else can : no didactic Scripture, anyhow. If the novelist keeps his thumb out of the pan.

But when the novelist *has* his thumb in the pan, the novel becomes an unparalleled perverter of men and women. To be compared only, perhaps, to that great mischief of sentimental hymns like *Lead Kindly Light!* which have helped to rot the marrow in the bones of the present generation.

# Notes and Reviews.

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## Notes on Music.

### (IV) HOLST—AND KEATS.

MR. HOLST, after having in various works exploited the possibilities for musical treatment afforded by Christianity and Brahmanism, has, in his latest work, the First Choral Symphony, turned his attention to the gods of pagan antiquity, as exemplified in several poems of Keats. In the analytical programme notes to the first London performance we are told that "The composer has taken four poems or parts of poems of Keats and welded them into a consistent whole, in a way which makes the Symphony a literary as well as a musical achievement." Let us try to discover in what this literary achievement consists.

In the Prelude the composer takes the first and last stanzas only of the chorus in *Endymion* in which the shepherds of Latmos invoke the god Pan, omitting the rest. In the first movement proper he takes the song from *Endymion*, beginning "O Sorrow ! Why dost borrow," omitting the first five stanzas. After the seventh stanza the composer alters the order, putting the ninth next, then the eighth, then the tenth, leaves out two lines of the eleventh and the rest of the poem, repeating instead two lines only of the ninth to which he adds four from the end of the tenth. The slow movement consists of a setting of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. The scherzo makes use of the poem called "Fancy" down to the lines—

Where's the voice, however soft,  
One would hear so very oft ?

after which he omits all the end, repeating instead the first eight lines of the poem. The composer then tacks on to this a particularly idiotic piece of doggerel from the "Extracts from an Opera" (When wedding fiddles are a-playing, Huzza for folly O!). In the last movement he takes the first stanza of the "Spirit Song," then the first four lines of the *Hymn to Apollo*, which he re-writes, follows this with half of the *Ode to Apollo*, part of "Bards of Passion and of Mirth," the rest of the *Ode*, then the rest of "Bards of Passion," repeats the stanza from the "Spirit Song," and concludes this magnificent literary achievement with the last four lines of "Bards of Passion."

The whole question of the union of poetry and music is admit-

tedly a very difficult one to decide on purely abstract or theoretical principles. As a general rule, however, it is safe to say that the greater the poem the less it calls for musical treatment. There may be exceptions to this rule, but certainly the Ode on a Grecian Urn is not one of them. That any composer could possibly imagine that it was possible to enhance the beauty of such a poem, or that it was even possible to set it to music with any degree of success, can only be taken to indicate a most fatuous arrogance or blatant insensitivity to literature on his part. Even if he were to succeed in writing music which was intrinsically interesting, it could only be achieved at the expense of the poem.

But when it comes to picking out different sections of various poetical masterpieces, re-writing them, and making complete nonsense of them in the process, it becomes difficult to speak with restraint. This is more than impertinence; it is a sacrilegious outrage on literature and good taste. Musicians are the first to protest, and rightly too, when fragments of great music are wrenched from their context and pieced together in such a way as to form an appropriate accompaniment to a cinema film. If a producer were to take a symphony of Beethoven, pull it to bits, and then stitch it up again according to his requirements and tastes, together with fragments from other works, and then proudly claimed that it was a musical achievement, a howl of indignation would at once arise in the musical press. Cannot musicians see that it is an equally objectionable practice to mutilate great poetry for the purposes of music? If not, it is time they were told so.

It must be admitted that several great masters in the past have been guilty of similar practices. It is true, for example, that Berlioz made use of Goethe's Faust and Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet for musical purposes, but in doing so he altered and adapted the originals to such an extent that they became new works, not travesties of old ones—fantasias on literary themes, reconceived *ab initio*, which in consequence hardly offend our æsthetic sense of fitness, if at all. It must further be remembered that Goethe and Shakespeare were not themselves the first to treat these subjects which Berlioz has only made use of in order to achieve a purely musical conception of his own. Holst's case is on a different plane altogether. It is not merely the general ideas and themes of the poems which he has utilised; he has no musical conception of his own to offer, but contents himself with following slavishly, line by line and word by word, the poetic text. Without the words, the music is completely formless and unintelligible. With Berlioz, in short, the literary conception only serves to render more explicit a musical conception; with Holst, on the contrary, the conception itself is wholly literary, which he then attempts to realise in musical form.

If the resultant music were intrinsically good, or at least in accordance with the spirit of the poems, it might be easier, for a

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musician at least, to condone the offence. Unfortunately, it is neither one nor the other. In its melody the work is arid and uncouth, the harmony sour and morose, the rhythms angular, the orchestration lacking in sonority though often noisy, and the texture in general thin and coarsely woven. Over and above all it reveals a total lack of creative imagination, of spontaneity, of purely musical invention.

What then, it may be asked, is the secret of Holst's popularity, and the explanation of the general esteem in which it is held by many quite intelligent people? The answer is that, in the words of Scriabine, a composer of a very similar type, "The public is particularly aroused by productions which have philosophic ideas as their basis, and combine the elements of various arts." This is an axiom which Holst has taken to heart and diligently followed in all his work. He is incapable of writing a work which can make an appeal without extraneous aids, by virtue of its purely musical interest. When he tries, as in the Fugal Concerto, the result is a puny, stunted little weakling, like a seven months' child. Not having any philosophic or literary conceptions of his own, as Scriabine at least had, Holst has ranged throughout the whole world, and has even had recourse to the solar system (in *The Planets*), in order to obtain sufficiently grandiose material and subject matter for his music.

There is not only bad taste and insensitiveness reflected in this constant preoccupation with megalomaniac conceptions, but also a fundamental, though probably unconscious, insincerity. It is not enough to be able to see, or even to exploit, the immense artistic possibilities of, let us say, the Faust legend; one must have lived it and experienced it, and have been, in a sense, a Faust oneself. And when Holst, in his Ode to Death, for example (a setting of an extract from Whitman's "Memories of President Lincoln"), ends with an invocation to Death to "Come," repeated several times, one does not in the least feel that the composer is longing for extinction, as one ought, at least momentarily, to do. On the contrary, one is fairly certain that he would very much resent it if Death were to take him at his word, and were suddenly to enter the Queen's Hall, attired in all his symbolic insignia, and were to transport him forcibly to the *au-delà* for which he ostensibly yearns. In other words, the composer is only employing the poem as a pretext for striking an impressive attitude, and this is equally true of all his other works. If he succeeds in impressing many people, it is because they involuntarily attribute to the music the profundity and sincerity of the poem.

That is the main reason for Holst's success, which has been strengthened and intensified by an exceptionally elaborate and well-organised press campaign. But it would be a mistake to suppose that the composer has himself been in any way responsible for this. Indeed, he gives the impression of being somewhat bewildered

by it all, like Christopher Sly, the drunken tinker in the prologue to the *Taming of the Shrew*, who awoke to find himself treated as a Duke. It is pleasant to reflect that possibly this press campaign is only a similar practical joke on the part of a few people with an abnormally developed sense of humour. But even if it were so, it has already been allowed to go too far, with the result that those who have not been made privy to the joke seem to be taking the situation seriously. It is time that our Christopher Sly were carried back to the tavern whence he came, for truly there is as much difference between this former trombone player and a great composer, as there was between the drunken tinker and the noble Duke.

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CECIL GRAY.

### THE MODERN POET.

POEMS, 1909-1925. By T. S. ELIOT. Faber & Gwyer. 7s. 6d.

If there were to be held a Congress of the Younger Poets, and it were desired to make some kind of show of recognition to the poet who has most effectively upheld the reality of the art in an age of preposterous poeticising, it is impossible to think of any serious rival to the name of T. S. Eliot. Yet, to secure the highest degree of unanimity, such a resolution would have to be worded to the exclusion of certain considerations, and it would concentrate attention on the significance of this work to other poets, rather than on its possession of that quality of "beauty" for which the ordinary reader looks, though we do not doubt that on this count, too, perhaps the final one, it will slowly but certainly gain the timid ears which only time can coax to an appreciation of the unfamiliar.

"That Mr. T. S. Eliot is the poet who has approached most nearly the solution of those problems which have stood in the way of our free poetic expression," and "that the contemporary sensibility, which otherwise must have suffered dumbly, often becomes articulate in his verse," are resolutions which express a sort of legal minimum to which individual judgments must subscribe.

The impression we have always had of Mr. Eliot's work, reinforced by this commodious collection in one volume, may be analysed into two coincident but not quite simultaneous impressions. The first is the urgency of the personality, which seems sometimes oppressive, and comes near to breaking through the so finely-spun æsthetic fabric; the second is the technique which spins this fabric and to which this slender volume owes its curious ascendancy over the bulky monsters of our time. For it is by his struggle with technique that Mr. Eliot has been able to get closer than any other poet to the physiology of our sensations (a poet does not speak merely for himself) to explore and make palpable the more intimate distresses of a generation for whom all the romantic escapes had been blocked. And, though this may seem a heavy burden to lay on the back of technique, we can watch with the deepening of

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consciousness, a much finer realisation of language, reaching its height in passages in "The Waste Land" until it sinks under the strain and in "The Hollow Men" becomes gnomically disarticulate.

The interval is filled with steady achievement, and though the seeds of dissolution are apparent rather early, there is a middle period in which certain things are done which make it impossible for the poet who has read them to regard his own particular problems of expression in the same way again; though he may refuse the path opened, a new field of force has come into being which exerts an influence, creates a tendency, even in despite of antipathy. Such a phenomenon is not in itself a measure of poetic achievement; Donne produced it in his generation; much smaller men, Denham and Waller, in theirs.

Let us take three main stages in this development of technique, the three poems which are, in essence, Mr. Eliot's poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land." (The neo-satiric quatrains do not raise any fundamental queries, they are the most easily appreciated of Mr. Eliot's poems, after "La Figlia che Piange.") The French poems remind us of Dryden's prefaces (*vide* Swift), and there are half-a-dozen other mere *jeux d'esprit*.)

"Gerontion" is much nearer to "The Waste Land" than "The Love Song" is to "Gerontion." The exquisite's witty drawing-room manner and the deliberate sentimental rhythms give way to more mysterious, further-reaching symbols, and simpler, not blatantly poetic rhythms. As an instance, we have in "The Love Song":—

"For I have known them all already, known them all :  
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons."

But in "The Waste Land":—

"And I Tiresias have foreshadowed all  
Enacted on this same divan or bed ;  
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall  
And walked among the lowest of the dead."

The relation and the differences of these passages hardly need stressing, but, though I had not intended to enter into an examination of the psychological content of these poems, I find that this subject of fore-knowledge is cardinal to the matter. Fore-knowledge is fatal to the Active man, for whom impulse must not seem alien to the end, as it is to the vegetative life of the poets, whose ends are obscured in the means. The passage in "Gerontion" beginning: "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" and the remainder of the poem are such profound commentary on the consequent annihilation of the will and desire that they must be left to more intimate consideration. The passage is a dramatic monologue, an adaptation one might hazard of the later Elizabethan soliloquy, down even to the Seneca:—

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“ Think

Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices  
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues  
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.”

“ *Gerontion* ” is a poem which runs pretty close to “ *The Waste Land* ”, and it is free from the more mechanical devices of the later poem, but lacks its fine original verse-movements. In the Sweeney quatrains, especially in the last stanzas of “ *Among the Nightingales* ”, the noble and the base, the foul and fine, are brought together with a shock ; the form has little elasticity, and tends to become, like the couplet, stereotyped antithesis. In the fluid medium of “ *The Waste Land* ” the contrast may be brought about just as violently, or it may be diffused. This contrast is not, of course, the whole content of the poem, but Mr. Eliot has most singularly solved by its means the problem of revoking that differentiation between poetic and real values which has so sterilised our recent poetry. His success is intermittent ; after a short passage of exquisite verse he may bilk us with a foreign quotation, an anthropological ghost, or a mutilated quotation. We may appreciate his intention in these matters, the contrast, the parody, enriches the emotional aura surrounding an original passage, but each instance must be judged on its own merits ; whether the parody, for instance, is apposite. On this score Mr. Eliot cannot be acquitted of an occasional cheapness, nor of a somewhat complacent pedantry, and since we cannot believe that these deviations are intrinsic to the poetic mind, we must look for their explanation elsewhere. We find it in the intermittent working of Mr. Eliot’s verbal imagination. He has the art of words, the skill which springs from sensitiveness, and an unmatched literary apprehension which enables him to create exquisite passages largely at second-hand (lines 60-77). It is when this faculty fails of imaginative support, as it must at times, that certain devices are called in ; the intellect is asked to fill in gaps (possibly by reference to the notes, when they are, as they rarely are, helpful) which previous poets have filled in with rhetoric, perhaps, but at any rate by a verbal creation which stimulates the sensibility. The object of this verbal effort is not merely to stimulate the sensibility, since disjunctive syllables can do that, but to limit, control, and direct it towards a more intense apprehension of the whole poem. That is where a failure in verbal inventiveness is a definite poetic lapse. In a traditional poet it would result in a patch of dull verse, in Mr. Eliot’s technique we get something like this :—

“ To Carthage then I came.  
Burning, burning, burning burning.  
O Lord thou pluckest me out  
O Lord thou pluckest  
burning.”

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Whether this is better or worse than dull verse I need not decide ; that it is a failure, or the æsthetic scheme which would justify it is wrong, can I think be fairly upheld.

Though we may grasp the references to Buddah's Fire Sermon and Augustine's Confessions, and though Mr. Eliot may tell us that "the collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident," we find it difficult to be impressed. It is the danger of the æsthetic of "The Waste Land" that it tempts the poet to think the undeveloped theme a positive triumph and obscurity more precious than commonplace. The collocation of Buddah and Augustine is interesting enough, when known, but it is not poetically effective because the range of their association is only limited by widely dispersed elements in the poem, and the essential of poetry is the presence of concepts in mutual irritation.

This criticism might be extended to the general consideration of the technique of construction used in "The Waste Land;" it is still exploited as a method, rather than mastered. The apparently free, or subconsciously motivated, association of the elements of the poem allows that complexity of reaction which is essential to the poet now, when a stable emotional attitude seems a memory of historical grandeur. The freedom from metrical conformity, though not essential as "Don Juan" shows, is yet an added and important emancipation, when the regular metres languish with hardly an exception in the hands of mechanicians who are competent enough, but have no means of making their consciousness speak through and by the rhythm. Mr. Eliot's sense of rhythm will, perhaps, in the end, be found his most lasting innovation, as it is the quality which strikes from the reader the most immediate response.

EDGELL RICKWORD.

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SIMONETTA PERKINS. By L. P. Hartley. Putnam. 7s. 6d.

Two readers of Mr. Hartley's novel were having a discussion. "I am beginning to weary of these well-written, intelligent novels," said one of them. "Perhaps you know the kind I mean : observant, neat and graceful exercises upon a 'situation' (the last gasp of the dying 'plot'), or studious close-ups of a 'temperament' isolated from its background, which seems to lose artistic value in proportion to the disbelief in plot."

"I agree that *Simonetta Perkins* is intelligent and well-written," answered the other. "But your generalisation isn't very apt. This clear and briefly managed sketch of an American girl in Venice does not depend disproportionately on either its revelation of Miss Lavinia Johnstone's personality or the incidents of her relationship with the handsome gondolier ; certainly not the latter, for though Lavinia is so far infatuated as actually to make the customary proposal to the indifferent Emilio, she backs out at the last moment

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and, indeed, Emilio makes no pretence of rating her proffered bribe for his love differently from the remuneration for his ordinary services. No, Lavinia stays in her background, and both keep moving. The mother, with her Boston airs and her entire obliviousness of Lavinia's destructive maiden nature, is certainly rather a stock figure. The vulgar Kolynopulos couple and the sociable Wintons are characterised without much strangeness. But the few strokes by which Mr. Hartley raises their outlines are—it is not too much to say—unerring; and his noiseless humour, his tolerance and his malice go far to make up in his general comment what is lacking in the individualisation."

"But isn't that precisely the difference between the novelist proper and the man of letters? The unspecialised writer may express ideas of human life unsurpassable for shrewdness or truth; those of Mr. Hartley are notable as much for sensitiveness as—good taste. But the pleasure one gets from his ironic and comprehensive attitude towards the people in *Simonetta Perkins* hardly compensates for the inferior interest one feels in the people themselves."

"Oh, so you admit you enjoyed the book?"

"Why, yes. Haven't I said that it is intelligent and"—

"You said it disparagingly. It appears now that the qualities which, according to you, qualify the merits of this novel are nevertheless the causes of your enjoying it."

"They are accessory qualities usurping the first place, which belongs properly, in any good novel, to the imaginative forces adapting themselves to narrative."

"That's a little vague; I won't say muddled."

"Your forbearance is proper, for you also, I fancy, suffer from the disabilities of our contemporary language of criticism. For instance, when I said that *Simonetta Perkins* was "well-written" and made it clear that I regarded this as a secondary virtue in a novel, you did not challenge me on the point. Yet in any plausible aesthetic that statement would be nonsense."

"Possibly. But, in the absence of such an aesthetic, to value a book in any but its own terms is to queer your pleasure in it, as well as your criticism of it. On the other hand, the comparative method might be used more liberally than you would seem to grant."

"Then, decidedly, *Simonetta Perkins* is a distinguished first novel."

"One perfunctory somersault deserves another. I agree that Mr. Hartley is a good writer."

BERTRAM HIGGINS.

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THE BACKGROUND OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AND  
OTHER ESSAYS. By H. J. C. Grierson. Chatto & Windus.  
7s. 6d.

These collected essays form a body of interesting and invigorat-

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ing criticism, the best of them being the title essay, *Byron : Arnold and Swinburne*, and the already well known one on the *Metaphysical Poets*. Occasionally the author falls back into the boring academic method of justifying the accepted, but for the most part his point of view is individual. The former state of mind leads him into inconsistencies. For instance, he speaks of "Didactic and Satire, the dreariest and most ephemeral kinds of poetry," and yet praises the *great* poetic achievement of *Don Juan* as being a *great* satire; and again, he talks of the "*great* Victorian romantic poets," while he confesses to finding "their beauty, a beauty somewhat remote from life," languid and timid. In the same way he relapses from the attitude which usually enlivens his criticism when he says of Byron, "if he found no escape by way of the imagination and the heart such as Blake and Wordsworth and Shelley discovered or dreamed they had discovered, he was less prone to identify poetic with real values." It was for failing to do this that Arnold called Shelley an "*ineffectual angel*," and it is in so far as Byron succeeded that he is great as a poet.

It is, indeed, the more or less sustained denial of this romantic fallacy which makes Professor Grierson's book of value. He praises Byron for having written (in *Don Juan*) "a poem, which is a poem, yet is concerned from first to last with realities and nothing but realities." He wrote at a time when the tradition or background of poetry—broadly speaking, the negative assurance of Pope—was breaking down, and when the poet was obliged—as Professor Grierson points out in his first essay, the contemporary poet is obliged—to invade "the realm of the novelist, for the novel is the form of literature which above all demands a contemporary, realistic background." The success of *Don Juan* is, therefore, in part, an answer to the question raised in the earlier essay, "whether high and enduring poetry is likely to flourish in a period when there is no great common tradition, religious and æsthetic, uniting the poet to his audience." Donne's poetry is a further reply. He, too, came at a time when a tradition, in this case the petrarchan, was foundering, and by breaking away from it, wrote poetry higher, indeed, and more enduring than Byron's. (Professor Grierson's qualification, which he repeats, of Donne's verse as "harsh and careless," is, incidentally, not justified.) It is largely from the vigour with which he praises two such poets and from his generally combative attitude to Bruenetière's assertions that these essays derive the vitality which makes them worth reading.

D. M. G.

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POETRY AND CRITICISM. By EDITH SITWELL. Hogarth Press. 2s. 6d.

"What's that pretty booklet you have under your arm?"

"The latest Hogarth Essay. There, have a look at it."

"Twenty-eight pages, 2s. 6d. Well, I suppose it is worth the

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money. A comprehensive title ; and Miss Sitwell is a poet of interest. Is it a general argument she advances, or does she sound the relations between these two activities at the present time ? "

" It could hardly be called a general argument."

" A prophetically inclined critique, then, with contemporary instances. That's always a dangerous ledge for criticism, but a true poet can afford the risk, and he alone is likely to survive it. What is Miss Sitwell's attitude ? Is the essay novel or provocative, or does she confine herself to exposition ? "

" More expository than anything else."

" A theory ? Or an interpretation of the common measure, the spirit of the age, in certain modern poets ? "

" It is not easy to put it in a word."

" Come, don't be so laconic. You know my poverty and my eagerness for culture. My library—Mudie's, of course—is not altogether satisfactory about new publications, and it is my habit to buttonhole reviewers at the beginning of each season and get them to supplement my list with the names of the really worth-while books. They like to be asked, and it saves me a great deal of bother when I go to look them up, a few months afterwards, in the British Museum."

" Your devotion to literature is as touching as your reliance on authority. The whole commonwealth—with the possible exception of authors—is surely the gainer by your enthusiasm. I cannot resist such an appeal. Yet, to be sure, there's not much I can do for you in the present case."

" How so ? Haven't you read the essay ? "

" I have just come from doing so. But, would you believe me, I cannot call to mind any part of its contents. You had better prompt me with further questions."

" This is strange, indeed. Don't you care for Miss Sitwell's poetry ? "

" I admire it sincerely in many respects."

" Then do open out a little. Tell me what you think of her work as a whole."

" Your naivety deserves a complete answer. Unfortunately, I must be going in a moment."

" Oh, I say, this is really very bad of you. Well, I'll be brief as you could wish. Question one : What is the subject she deals with ? "

" First of all she shows how the great poets of the past have been reviled, quoting from contemporary reviews of their work " —

" But that is all in the compilation called ' Famous Reviews,' so cheap that even I have purchased it. What then ? "

" She suggests that the same thing is happening to-day."

" To whom ? "

" No names mentioned. But the paraphrases and quotations—here, look for yourself—may let you into the secret."

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"Here's one."

"No, that's a misquotation from Beddoes. The other passages."

"I see. Well, I'm not the sort of man that scoffs at family feeling—still less when it is properly balanced with self-respect. I'll put the book down on my list under the heading 'Miscellaneous and Personal.'"

BERTRAM HIGGINS.

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THE LITTLE WORLD. By STELLA BENSON. (Macmillan, 8s. 6d. net.)

Probably it was inevitable that readers of Miss Benson's novels should be disappointed by this collection of articles. Admirable journalism though they are, there is missing from most of them precisely those qualities that made "A Poor Man" and "Living Alone" remarkable. This appears to be due not so much to any tendency on Miss Benson's part to "write down" to her popular audience (though she does this), as to the rule, apparently intangible, that articles of this sort should diffuse an atmosphere of shallow cheerfulness. The consequent banishment of her ironic sympathy and its related, rather disparate, intellectual gaiety leaves only the subsidiary qualities of an acute eye for colour and form in external objects and a faculty for lively and intelligent comment.

Perhaps the author's own account of her attitude to the world she travels in may make the point clearer:—"I have always suffered from diverted attention. Of the two distinct general compartments of my mind, the one into which the sun most rarely shines is the one reserved for soul-stirring impressions. The other compartment, filled with little curious happenings connected with everything or nothing, with spiders and spaghetti, boarding-house keepers and beetles, puppies and Prime Ministers, is constantly in use, with the blinds always drawn up." Here is a hint of the disillusionment so characteristic of the novels, arrested, however, at an earlier stage than it is in them. For the question is not one of "diverted attention"; Miss Benson receives from "little curious happenings" impressions quite as soul-stirring as she would derive from an undiverted scrutiny of the Taj Mahal, but not from all of them. So that, whereas in her novels Miss Benson's astringent, formative wit compels her to select only such incidents as stand in significant relation to her theme, the looser organisation but more arbitrary atmosphere of these articles makes possible, on the one hand, the utilisation of all such experiences and necessitates, on the other, their "bright" treatment. The result, visible in the paragraphs quoted with its string of loosely antithetical alliterations, is, instead of wit, a sort of humour.

Nevertheless, "The Little World" is a very entertaining book, and it contains nearly a dozen articles that are equal to Miss Benson's best work. In them Miss Benson's rather Chaplinesque theme of the individual who is too sensitive to submit contentedly to modern

civilisation's standardising tendency, but is too weak to be able to impose his own terms on Society, reappears. But these articles, too, are often spoiled, as Chaplin's work is, but, as for example, "The Poor Man" is not, by the arbitrary happy ending.

## Among New Books

**A POET'S ALPHABET.** By W. H. DAVIES. Cape. 3s. 6d.

Mr. Davies no longer celebrates Nature with a whole heart. His recent poetry is disturbed by the dull pain of disillusionments to which he cannot adapt his style. His limpid Caroline technique, which carry so gracefully the thistledown impress of his perceptions, cannot bear up against the stormy pressure of these later apprehensions: the faithlessness of friends, friendship's callous exploitation of a sympathy it has outgrown; the vicious privileges of love; the death of passion under the distrust of motives—of beauty under the dispersion of desire.

But I'd give any poor blind man  
One of these precious jewels, free,  
Could he restore the inward sight  
That Time is taking away from me.

It is natural for poetry to hide an aspiration for the future in an idealization of the past. But one feels that Mr. Davies' development, if it is not to be pulled up short, must proceed on other lines. His early lyrical vein is clearly exhausted; worse than that, its remaining energy is turning the inventions of early inspiration into opportunities for virtuosity. The very slight poems of this volume, which is garnished with tiny back-to-the-womb decorations, show his once famous naïvety still disconsolate for its irrecoverable purity.

**SICILIAN NOON.** By LOUIS GOLDING. Chatto & Windus. 7s. 6d. net.

In Sicily, it seems, haunted by memories of Magna Grecia, we wander uneasily from shrine to shrine. We are not wholly Aphrodite's, nor wholly Mary's; we worship Astarte timidly, and are set wondering about Christ. And unfortunately, being moderns, we cannot altogether forget our own Thersites cult of ugly interruptions. So at least Mr. Golding. He embroiders pages of beauty to the Cyprian Goddess and then turns to placate Thersites with a phrase like "psychological readjustment," or by an irrelevant and no doubt assumed failure to distinguish between "vitamines or calories—or do they call them ampères?" The book seems planned after the writings of Mr. Norman Douglas, but it is a slighter work and the style is not even. The entertaining episodes are sometimes over elaborate. Astarte receives homage in several vivid pages, and indirectly in the application of the adjective "obscene" to—amongst other things—mud, the moaning of doves, monkeys (not real monkeys, but those existent in the sexually-excited phantasy), and, negatively, to female Fascism.

*Sicilian Noon* is well above the ordinary book of travel, but it is too uneven in quality to be altogether enjoyable.

**DOCTOR JOHN FAUSTUS.** The Broadway Translations (Illustrated). Routledge. 7s. 6d.

This volume contains a modernised text of the earliest extant editions of the English Faust and Wagner Books (1592 and 1594 respectively). These extraordinary documents have hitherto been difficult to come at; outside libraries, there was only A. W. Ward's edition of "Marlowe's Tragical History" and Greene's "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay," which gives merely the passages paralleled in Marlowe's work.

## AMONG NEW BOOKS

The questions raised by these books, apart from the literary ones, are many, and mostly, so far, unanswered. We do not see much hope of elucidating the myth until the historical method is subordinated to the psychological. The historical evidence goes to diminish the links between the German conjurer and the hero of the myth rather than to strengthen them. That the figure of the myth reflects a desire of the mass-mind, tentatively expressed in other popular figures of sorcerers (Virgil, for example) seems a necessary basis of interpretation. That Luther derived much of his driving force from his kinship, on one side, to this spirit of arrogance and the assertion of the individual will, is also plausible, though his revolt was submerged in a more terrible surrender. It remained for Milton to sublimate the squalid charlatan to quasi-divine heights, for Marlowe to lift his human significance to the pitch of tragedy. We cannot agree with the present editor, Mr. William Rose, when he says in his interesting introduction that Marlowe "has done little to raise the (popular) conception to a higher plane." In Goethe's work the theme receives an ethical twist which makes it essentially different from the one embodied in the contemporary legend.

The rapid dissolution of the real meaning of the myth in the farcical bye-play which accompanies it (the lowest form of the expression of the hatred of authority) shows how fragile a structure a mass-creation, without the intervening individuality of the poet, must be. The certainty of damnation is not to be contemplated with calm by the socialised ape, so the slave-mind soon found a more congenial expression for itself:

Who'er aspires unweariedly  
Is not beyond redeeming.

But, since man naturally hates god, the progeny of the damned conjurer, humanity's stalking-horse and scape-goat, will always in some form or another, have a part in our scene.

**MULCASTER'S ELEMENTARIE.** 1582. Edited by E. T. CAMPONIAC. Clarendon Press. 10s. 6d.

It is difficult to remember that only three hundred and fifty years ago the justification of English as a language fitted for grave and learned purposes was a task which demanded skill, eloquence and scholarship. Yet Bolton's *Hypercritica*, which discusses the difficulties of the historian venturing to treat his subject in the vulgar tongue, was written probably thirty years later—when poetry was beating all the bounds of language. Mulcaster's treatise is a sober and substantial piece of work. This reprint will be valuable in many ways, not least as a document which fixes with accuracy the contemporary state of the language, at least in some of its aspects. The present volume is an addition to the Tudor and Stuart Library, which in type and format is most pleasantly designed.

**THE POEMS OF JOHN MILTON.** Edited by H. J. C. GRIERSON. Vol. II.

*Paradise Lost.* The Florence Press. Chatto & Windus. 12s. 6d. net.

The second and final volume in this admirable edition. We should like to see the attempt to boom Dryden at the expense of Milton thoroughly disposed of. M. Saurat has given us an invigorating analysis of the intellectual and emotional elements which entered into this poem, it remains for a modern poet to tell us, without any academic kow-towing, how *Paradise Lost* continues to exist as a great poem, or to accept the burden of proving that it doesn't.

Professor Grierson's text is of particular interest, following as it does the second edition, which had Milton's scrupulous revision.

**PSYCHE:** The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks. By ERWIN ROHDE. Kegan Paul. 25s.

A finely conceived and well-written work, which, though exhaustive to the limits of scholarship, is also open to the intelligent reader. Coming

## THE CALENDAR

before the great work of Frazer, it avoids the tentative interpretations of the pre-psycho-analysis school of anthropologists. Its important achievement is the establishing of what the immortality beliefs seemed to mean to those who directed their actions by them.

**RUYSBROECK THE ADMIRABLE.** By A. WAUTIER D'AYGALLIERS. Authorised Translation by FRED ROTHWELL. Dent. 12s. 6d. net.

Of the two parts into which this book is divided, a sketch of the historical environment of Ruysbroeck and an analysis of the philosophical elements in his mysticism, the second is much the more satisfactory. The historical sketch is hazy and rhetorical. The philosophical analysis is detailed but suffers from lack of arrangement, and the reader is left with only a vague conception of Ruysbroeck's personal contribution to the body of Neo-platonic-Christian mystical doctrine. Some of the blame for the pathetic helplessness displayed in the writing must no doubt be allotted to the translator.

**THE TCHEKA:** The Red Inquisition. By GEORGE POPOFF. A. M. Philpott. 8s. 6d.

An account, from personal experience, of the methods employed for dealing with suspected "subversive elements" in the Soviet Empire. Mr. Popoff shows more restraint than many writers on the same subject who have perhaps suffered less than he has. The questions raised by his book are fundamental—to the *littérateur* as well as to the politician. What are the real meanings of the words liberty, justice and civilisation, or, in other words, what is the essential relation between the individual and society? How far, in fact, are the Marquis of Queensbury rules drawn up by democratic sentiment capable of being imposed on the perpetual warfare of man and man?

**PRINCESS LIEVEN. HER UNPUBLISHED DIARY AND POLITICAL SKETCHES.** Edited with elucidations by HAROLD TEMPERLEY. (Cape. 12s. 6d.)

This is an unusually intimate introduction into the circles where they control, or as Tolstoy would say, think they control, the destinies of nations. The Princess's early life coincides with the period of "War and Peace," but she seems to have been untouched imaginatively by the great struggle that was going on. Her career as amateur diplomatist may be said to have begun with her marriage, at the age of fifteen, to Count Lieven, who, though only twenty-seven, was Minister of War to the Czar Paul. Her account of the Czar's assassination given here, has previously only been published in Germany. It was whilst her husband was ambassador to London, from 1812 to 1834, that she became a notable figure. Her Diary, covering the years 1825-30 has long been known to exist, but it is now printed for the first time, from a transcript of the original in the Moscow archives. This document, together with her very frank sketches of the Duke of Clarence, the Grand Duke Constantine, Palmerston, and other big-wigs, and Mr. Temperley's elucidations, throw an illuminating ray on some dark corners of political history. As a study of an uncommon personality, the Princess's lovers included the brilliant Metternich, the book is also of interest.